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ADOLPHUS WILLIAM WARD

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NOTE.

THE peculiar conditions of this essay must be left to explain themselves. It could not have been written at all without the aid of the Publications of the Chaucer Society, and more especially of the labours of the Society's Director, Mr. Furnivall. To other recent writers on Chaucer—including Mr. Fleay, from whom I never differ but with hesitation—I have referred, in so far as it was in my power to do so. Perhaps I may take this opportunity of expressing a wish that Pauli's *History of England*, a work beyond the compliment of an acknowledgment, were accessible to every English reader.

A. W. W.

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CHAUCER.

CHAPTER I.

CHAUCER'S TIMES.

THE biography of Geoffrey Chaucer is no longer a mixture of unsifted facts, and of more or less hazardous conjectures. Many and wide as are the gaps in our knowledge concerning the course of his outer life, and doubtful as many important passages of it remain—in vexatious contrast with the certainty of other relatively insignificant *data*—we have at least become aware of the foundations on which alone a trustworthy account of it can be built. These foundations consist partly of a meagre though gradually increasing array of external evidence, chiefly to be found in public documents,—in the Royal Wardrobe Book, the Issue Rolls of the Exchequer, the Customs Rolls, and suchlike records—partly of the conclusions which may be drawn with confidence from the internal evidence of the poet's own indisputably genuine works, together with a few references to him in the writings of his contemporaries or immediate successors. Which of his works are to be accepted as genuine, necessarily forms the subject of an antecedent enquiry, such as cannot with

any degree of safety be conducted except on principles far from infallible with regard to all the instances to which they have been applied, but now accepted by the large majority of competent scholars. Thus, by a process which is in truth dulness and dryness itself except to patient endeavour stimulated by the enthusiasm of special literary research, a limited number of results has been safely established, and others have at all events been placed beyond reasonable doubt. Around a third series of conclusions or conjectures the tempest of controversy still rages; and even now it needs a wary step to pass without fruitless deviations through a maze of assumptions consecrated by their longevity, or commended to sympathy by the fervour of personal conviction.

A single instance must suffice to indicate both the difficulty and the significance of many of those questions of Chaucerian biography which, whether interesting or not in themselves, have to be determined before Chaucer's life can be written. They are not "all and some" mere antiquarians' puzzles, of interest only to those who have leisure and inclination for microscopic enquiries. So with the point immediately in view. It has been said with much force that Tyrwhitt, whose services to the study of Chaucer remain uneclipsed by those of any other scholar, would have composed a quite different biography of the poet, had he not been confounded by the formerly (and here and there still) accepted date of Chaucer's birth, the year 1328. For the correctness of this date Tyrwhitt "supposed" the poet's tombstone in Westminster Abbey to be the voucher; but the slab placed on a pillar near his grave (it is said at the desire of Caxton), appears to have merely borne a Latin inscription without any dates; and the marble monument erected in

its stead "in the name of the Muses" by Nicolas Brigham in 1556, while giving October 25th, 1400, as the day of Chaucer's death, makes no mention either of the date of his birth or of the number of years to which he attained, and, indeed, promises no more information than it gives. That Chaucer's contemporary, the poet Gower, should have referred to him in the year 1392 as "now in his days old," is at best a very vague sort of testimony, more especially as it is by mere conjecture that the year of Gower's own birth is placed as far back as 1320. Still less weight can be attached to the circumstance that another poet, Occleve, who clearly regarded himself as the disciple of one by many years his senior, in accordance with the common phraseology of his (and, indeed, of other) times, spoke of the older writer as his "father" and "father reverent." In a coloured portrait carefully painted from memory by Occleve on the margin of a manuscript, Chaucer is represented with grey hair and beard; but this could not of itself be taken to contradict the supposition that he died about the age of sixty. And Leland's assertion that Chaucer attained to old age self-evidently rests on tradition only; for Leland was born more than a century after Chaucer died. Nothing occurring in any of Chaucer's own works of undisputed genuineness throws any real light on the subject. His poem, the *House of Fame*, has been variously dated; but at any period of his manhood he might have said, as he says there, that he was "too old" to learn astronomy, and preferred to take his science on faith. In the curious lines called *L'Envoy de Chaucer à Scogan*, the poet, while blaming his friend for his want of perseverance in a love-suit, classes himself among "them that be hoar and round of shape," and

speaks of himself and his Muse as out of date and rusty. But there seems no sufficient reason for removing the date of the composition of these lines to an earlier year than 1393; and poets as well as other men since Chaucer have spoken of themselves as old and obsolete at fifty. A similar remark might be made concerning the reference to the poet's old age "which dulleth him in his spirit," in the *Complaint of Venus*, generally ascribed to the last decennium of Chaucer's life. If we reject the evidence of a further passage, in the *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, a poem of disputed genuineness, we accordingly arrive at the conclusion that there is no reason for demurring to the only direct external evidence in existence as to the date of Chaucer's birth. At a famous trial of a cause of chivalry held at Westminster in 1386, Chaucer, who had gone through part of a campaign with one of the litigants, appeared as a witness; and on this occasion his age was, doubtless on his own deposition, recorded as that of a man "of forty years and upwards," who had borne arms for twenty-seven years. A careful enquiry into the accuracy of the record as to the ages of the numerous other witnesses at the same trial has established it in an overwhelming majority of instances; and it is absurd gratuitously to charge Chaucer with having understated his age from motives of vanity. The conclusion, therefore, seems to remain unshaken, that he was born about the year 1340, or some time between that year and 1345.

Now, we possess a charming poem by Chaucer called the *Assembly of Fowls*, elaborately courtly in its conception, and in its execution giving proofs of Italian reading on the part of its author, as well as of a ripe humour such as is rarely an accompaniment of extreme youth.

This poem has been thought by earlier commentators to allegorise an event known to have happened in 1358, by later critics another which occurred in 1364. Clearly, the assumption that the period from 1340 to 1345 includes the date of Chaucer's birth, suffices of itself to stamp the one of these conjectures as untenable, and the other as improbable, and (when the style of the poem and treatment of its subject are taken into account) adds weight to the other reasons in favour of the date 1381 for the poem in question. Thus, backwards and forwards, the disputed points in Chaucer's biography and the question of his works are affected by one another.

Chaucer's life, then, spans rather more than the latter half of the fourteenth century, the last year of which was indisputably the year of his death. In other words, it covers rather more than the interval between the most glorious epoch of Edward III.'s reign—for Crecy was fought in 1346—and the downfall, in 1399, of his unfortunate successor Richard II.

The England of this period was but a little land, if numbers be the test of greatness; but in Edward III.'s time as in that of Henry V., who inherited so much of Edward's policy and revived so much of his glory, there stirred in this little body a mighty heart. It is only of a small population that the author of the *Vision concerning Piers Plowman* could have gathered the representatives into a single field, or that Chaucer himself could have composed a family picture fairly comprehending, though not altogether exhausting, the chief national character-types. In the year of King Richard II.'s accession (1377), according to a trustworthy calculation based

upon the result of that year's poll-tax, the total number of the inhabitants of England seems to have been two millions and a half. A quarter of a century earlier—in the days of Chaucer's boyhood—their numbers had been perhaps twice as large. For not less than four great pestilences (in 1348–9, 1361–2, 1369, and 1375–6) had swept over the land, and at least one-half of its population, including two-thirds of the inhabitants of the capital, had been carried off by the ravages of the obstinate epidemic—"the foul death of England," as it was called in a formula of execration in use among the people. In this year 1377, London, where Chaucer was doubtless born as well as bred, where the greater part of his life was spent, and where the memory of his name is one of those associations which seem familiarly to haunt the banks of the historic river from Thames Street to Westminster, apparently numbered not more than 35,000 souls. But if, from the nature of the case, no place was more exposed than London to the inroads of the Black Death, neither was any other so likely elastically to recover from them. For the reign of Edward III. had witnessed a momentous advance in the prosperity of the capital,—an advance reflecting itself in the outward changes introduced during the same period into the architecture of the city. Its wealth had grown larger as its houses had grown higher; and mediæval London, such as we are apt to picture it to ourselves, seems to have derived those leading features which it so long retained, from the days when Chaucer, with downcast but very observant eyes, passed along its streets between Billingsgate and Aldgate. Still, here as elsewhere in England the remembrance of the most awful physical visitations which have ever befallen the country must have long lingered; and, after all has been said, it is

wonderful that the traces of them should be so exceedingly scanty in Chaucer's pages. Twice only in his poems does he refer to the Plague:—once in an allegorical fiction which is of Italian if not of French origin, and where, therefore, no special reference to the ravages of the disease *in England* may be intended when Death is said to have "a thousand slain this pestilence,"—

> he hath slain this year
> Hence over a mile, within a great village
> Both men and women, child and hind and page.

The other allusion is a more than half humorous one. It occurs in the description of the *Doctor of Physic*, the grave graduate in purple surcoat and blue white-furred hood; nor, by the way, may this portrait itself be altogether without its use as throwing some light on the helplessness of fourteenth-century medical science. For though in all the world there was none like this doctor to *speak* of physic and of surgery;—though he was a very perfect practitioner, and never at a loss for telling the cause of any malady and for supplying the patient with the appropriate drug, sent in by the doctor's old and faithful friends the apothecaries;—though he was well versed in all the authorities from Æsculapius to the writer of the *Rosa Anglica* (who cures inflammation homœopathically by the use of red draperies);—though like a truly wise physician he began at home by caring anxiously for his own digestion and for his peace of mind ("his study was but little in the Bible");—yet the basis of his scientific knowledge was "astronomy," i. e. astrology, "the better part of medicine," as Roger Bacon calls it; together with that "natural magic" by which, as Chaucer elsewhere tells us, the famous among the learned have known how to make

men whole or sick. And there was one specific which, from a double point of view, Chaucer's Doctor of Physic esteemed very highly, and was loth to part with on frivolous pretexts. He was but easy (i. e. slack) of "dispence:"—

> He keptē that he won in pestilence.
> For gold in physic is a cordial;
> Therefore he lovèd gold in speciál.

Meanwhile the ruling classes seem to have been left untouched in heart by these successive ill-met and ill-guarded trials, which had first smitten the lower orders chiefly, then the higher with the lower (if the Plague of 1349 had swept off an archbishop, that of 1361 struck down among others Henry Duke of Lancaster, the father of Chaucer's Duchess Blanche). Calamities such as these would assuredly have been treated as warnings sent from on high, both in earlier times, when a Church better braced for the due performance of its never-ending task, eagerly interpreted to awful ears the signs of the wrath of God, and by a later generation, leavened in spirit by the self-searching morality of Puritanism. But from the sorely-tried third quarter of the fourteenth century the solitary voice of Langland cries, as the voice of Conscience preaching with her cross, that "these pestilences" are the penalty of sin and of naught else. It is assuredly presumptuous for one generation, without the fullest proof, to accuse another of thoughtlessness or heartlessness; and though the classes for which Chaucer mainly wrote and with which he mainly felt, were in all probability as little inclined to improve the occasions of the Black Death as the middle classes of the present day would be to fall on their knees after a season of com-

mercial ruin, yet signs are not wanting that in the later years of the fourteenth century words of admonition came to be not unfrequently spoken. The portents of the eventful year 1382 called forth moralisings in English verse, and the pestilence of 1391 a rhymed lamentation in Latin; and at different dates in King Richard's reign the poet Gower, Chaucer's contemporary and friend, inveighed both in Latin and in English, from his conservative point of view, against the corruption and sinfulness of society at large. But by this time the great peasant insurrection had added its warning, to which it was impossible to remain deaf.

A self-confident nation, however, is slow to betake itself to sackcloth and ashes. On the whole it is clear, that though the last years of Edward III. were a season of failure and disappointment,—though from the period of the First Pestilence onwards the signs increase of the king's unpopularity and of the people's discontent,—yet the overburdened and enfeebled nation was brought almost as slowly as the King himself to renounce the proud position of a conquering power. In 1363 he had celebrated the completion of his fiftieth year; and three suppliant kings had at that time been gathered as satellites round the sun of his success. By 1371 he had lost all his allies, and nearly all the conquests gained by himself and the valiant Prince of Wales; and during the years remaining to him his subjects hated his rule and angrily assailed his favourites. From being a conquering power the English monarchy was fast sinking into an island which found it difficult to defend its own shores. There were times towards the close of Edward's and early in his successor's reign, when matters would have gone hard with English traders, naturally desirous of having their money's worth for their subsidy

of tonnage and poundage, and anxious, like their type the *Merchant* in Chaucer, that "the sea were kept for anything" between Middelburgh and Harwich, had not some of them, such as the Londoner John Philpot, occasionally armed and manned a squadron of ships on their own account, in defiance of red tape and its censures. But in the days when Chaucer and the generation with which he grew up were young, the ardour of foreign conquest had not yet died out in the land, and clergy and laity cheerfully co-operated in bearing the burdens which military glory has at all times brought with it for a civilised people. The high spirit of the English nation, at a time when the decline in its fortunes was already near at hand (1366), is evident from the answer given to the application from Rome for the arrears of thirty-three years of the tribute promised by King John, or rather from what must unmistakeably have been the drift of that answer. Its terms are unknown, but the demand was never afterwards repeated.

The power of England in the period of an ascendancy to which she so tenaciously sought to cling, had not been based only upon the valour of her arms. Our country was already a rich one in comparison with most others in Europe. Other purposes besides that of providing good cheer for a robust generation were served by the wealth of her great landed proprietors, and of the "worthy vavasours" (smaller landowners) who, like Chaucer's *Franklin*—a very Saint Julian or pattern of hospitality—knew not what it was to be "without baked meat in the house," where their

> tables dormant in the hall alway
> Stood ready covered all the longë day.

From this source, and from the well-filled coffers of the

traders came the laity's share of the expenses of those foreign wars which did so much to consolidate national feeling in England. The foreign companies of merchants long contrived to retain the chief share of the banking business and export trade assigned to them by the short-sighted commercial policy of Edward III., and the weaving and fishing industries of Hanseatic and Flemish immigrants had established an almost unbearable competition in our own ports and towns. But the active import trade, which already connected England with both nearer and remoter parts of Christendom, must have been largely in native hands; and English chivalry, diplomacy, and literature followed in the lines of the trade-routes to the Baltic and the Mediterranean. Our mariners, like their type the *Shipman* in Chaucer (an anticipation of the "Venturer" of later days, with the pirate as yet, perhaps, more strongly marked in him than the patriot),—

> knew well all the havens, as they were
> From Gothland, to the Cape of Finisterre,
> And every creek in Brittany and Spain.

Doubtless, as may be noticed in passing, much of the tendency on the part of our shipmen in this period to self-help in offence as well as in defence, was due to the fact that the mercantile navy was frequently employed in expeditions of war, vessels and men being at times seized or impressed for the purpose by order of the Crown. On one of these occasions the port of Dartmouth, whence Chaucer at a venture ("for aught I wot") makes his *Shipman* hail, is found contributing a larger total of ships and men than any other port in England. For the rest, Flanders was certainly still far ahead of her future rival in wealth, and in mercantile and industrial activity; as a

manufacturing country she had no equal, and in trade the rival she chiefly feared was still the German Hansa. Chaucer's *Merchant* characteristically wears a "Flandrish beaver hat;" and it is no accident that the scene of the *Pardoner's Tale*, which begins with a description of "superfluity abominable," is laid in Flanders. In England, indeed the towns never came to domineer as they did in the Netherlands. Yet, since no trading country will long submit to be ruled by the landed interest only, so in proportion as the English towns, and London especially, grew richer, their voices were listened to in the settlement of the affairs of the nation. It might be very well for Chaucer to close the description of his *Merchant* with what looks very much like a fashionable writer's half sneer:—

> Forsooth, he was a worthy man withal;
> But, truly, I wot nót how men him call.

Yet not only was high political and social rank reached by individual "merchant princes," such as the wealthy William de la Pole, a descendant of whom is said (though on unsatisfactory evidence) to have been Chaucer's granddaughter, but the government of the country came to be very perceptibly influenced by the class from which they sprang. On the accession of Richard II., two London citizens were appointed controllers of the war-subsidies granted to the Crown; and in the Parliament of 1382 a committee of fourteen merchants refused to entertain the question of a merchants' loan to the king. The importance and self-consciousness of the smaller tradesmen and handicraftsmen increased with that of the great merchants. When in 1393 King Richard II. marked the termination of his quarrel with the City of London by a stately procession through "new Troy," he was welcomed,

according to the Friar who has commemorated the event in Latin verse, by the trades in an array resembling an angelic host; and among the crafts enumerated we recognise several of those represented in Chaucer's company of pilgrims—by the *Carpenter*, the *Webbe* (Weaver), and the *Dyer*, all clothed

> in one livery
> Of a solémn and great fraternity.

The middle class, in short, was learning to hold up its head, collectively and individually. The historical original of Chaucer's *Host*—the actual Master Harry Bailly, vintner and landlord of the Tabard Inn in Southwark, was likewise a member of Parliament, and very probably felt as sure of himself in real life as the mimic personage bearing his name does in its fictitious reproduction. And he and his fellows, the "poor and simple Commons"—for so humble was the style they were wont to assume in their addresses to the sovereign,—began to look upon themselves, and to be looked upon, as a power in the State. The London traders and handicraftsmen knew what it was to be well-to-do citizens, and if they had failed to understand it, home monition would have helped to make it clear to them:—

> Well seemèd each of them a fair burgéss,
> For sitting in a guildhall on a dais.
> And each one for the wisdom that he can
> Was shapely for to be an alderman.
> They had enough of chattels and of rent,
> And very gladly would their wives assent;
> And, truly, else they had been much to blame.
> It is full fair to be yclept *madáme*,
> And fair to go to vigils all before,
> And have a mantle royally y-bore.

The English State had ceased to be the feudal monarchy

—the ramification of contributory courts and camps—of the crude days of William the Conqueror and his successors. The Norman lords and their English dependants no longer formed two separate elements in the body politic. In the great French wars of Edward III., the English armies had no longer mainly consisted of the baronial levies. The nobles had indeed, as of old, ridden into battle at the head of their vassals and retainers; but the body of the force had been made up of Englishmen serving for pay, and armed with their national implement, the bow—such as Chaucer's *Yeoman* carried with him on the ride to Canterbury :—

> A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen
> Under his belt he bare full thriftily.
> Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly:
> His arrows droopèd not with feathers low,
> And in his hand he bare a mighty bow.

The use of the bow was specially favoured by both Edward III. and his successor; and when early in the next century the chivalrous Scottish king, James I. (of whom mention will be made among Chaucer's poetic disciples) returned from his long English captivity to his native land, he had no more eager care than that his subjects should learn to emulate the English in the handling of their favourite weapon. Chaucer seems to be unable to picture an army without it, and we find him relating how, from ancient Troy,—

> Hector and many a worthy wight out went
> With spear in hand, and with their big bows bent.

No wonder that when the battles were fought by the people itself, and when the cost of the wars was to so large an extent defrayed by its self-imposed contributions, the

Scottish and French campaigns should have called forth that national enthusiasm which found an echo in the songs of Lawrence Minot, as hearty war-poetry as has been composed in any age of our literature. They were put forth in 1352, and considering the unusual popularity they are said to have enjoyed, it is not impossible that they may have reached Chaucer's ears in his boyhood.

Before the final collapse of the great King's fortunes, and his death in a dishonoured old age, the ambition of his heir, the proudest hope of both dynasty and nation, had overleapt itself, and the Black Prince had preceded his father to the tomb. The good ship England (so sang a contemporary poet) was left without rudder or helm; and in a kingdom full of faction and discontent the future of the Plantagenet throne depended on a child. While the young king's ambitious uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (Chaucer's patron), was in nominal retirement, and his academical ally, Wyclif, was gaining popularity as the mouthpiece of the resistance to the papal demands, there were fermenting beneath the surface elements of popular agitation, which had been but little taken into account by the political factions of Edward the Third's reign, and by that part of its society with which Chaucer was more especially connected But the multitude, whose turn in truth comes but rarely in the history of a nation, must every now and then make itself heard, although poets may seem all but blind and deaf to the tempest as it rises, and bursts, and passes away. Many causes had concurred to excite the insurrection which temporarily destroyed the influence of John of Gaunt, and which for long cast a deep shade upon the effects of the teaching of Wyclif. The acquisition of a measure of rights and power by the middle classes had caused a general swaying

upwards; and throughout the peoples of Europe floated those dreams and speculations concerning the equality and fraternity of all men, which needed but a stimulus and an opportunity to assume the practical shape of a revolution. The melancholy thought which pervades Langland's *Vision* is still that of the helplessness of the poor; and the remedy to which he looks against the corruption of the governing classes is the advent of a superhuman king, whom he identifies with the ploughman himself, the representative of suffering humility. But about the same time as that of the composition of this poem—or not long afterwards—Wyclif had sent forth among the people his "simple priests," who illustrated by contrast the conflict which his teaching exposed between the existing practice of the Church and the original documents of her faith. The connexion between Wyclif's teaching and the peasants' insurrection under Richard II. is as undeniable as that between Luther's doctrines and the great social uprising in Germany a century and a half afterwards. When, upon the declaration of the Papal Schism, Wyclif abandoned all hope of a reform of the Church from within, and, defying the injunctions of foe and friend alike, entered upon a course of theological opposition, the popular influence of his followers must have tended to spread a theory admitting of very easy application *ad hominem*—the theory, namely, that the tenure of all offices, whether spiritual or temporal, is justified only by the personal fitness of their occupants. With such levelling doctrine, the Socialism of popular preachers like John Balle might seem to coincide with sufficient closeness; and since worthiness was not to be found in the holders of either spiritual or temporal authority, of either ecclesiastical or lay wealth, the time had palpably come for the poor man to enjoy his

own again. Then, the advent of a weak government, over which a powerful kinsman of the king and unconcealed adversary of the Church was really seeking to recover the control, and the imposition of a tax coming home to all men except actual beggars, and filling serfdom's cup of bitterness to overflowing, supplied the opportunity, and the insurrection broke out. Its violence fell short of that of the French *Jacquerie* a quarter of a century earlier; but no doubt could exist as to its critical importance. As it happened, the revolt turned with special fury against the possessions of the Duke of Lancaster, whose sympathies with the cause of ecclesiastical reform it definitively extinguished.

After the suppression of this appalling movement by a party of Order comprehending in it all who had anything to lose, a period of reaction ensued. In the reign of Richard II., whichever faction might be in the ascendant, and whatever direction the king's own sympathies may have originally taken, the last state of the peasantry was without doubt worse than the first. Wycliffism as an influence rapidly declined with the death of Wyclif himself, as it hardly could but decline, considering the absence from his teaching of any tangible system of church government; and Lollardry came to be the popular name, or nickname, for any and every form of dissent from the existing system. Finally, Henry of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's son, mounted the throne as a sort of saviour of society,—a favourite character for usurpers to pose in before the applauding assemblage of those who claim "a stake in the country." Chaucer's contemporary, Gower, whose wisdom was of the kind which goes with the times, who was in turn a flatterer of Richard and (by the simple expedient of a revised second

edition of his *magnum opus*) a flatterer of Henry, offers better testimony than Chaucer to the conservatism of the upper classes of his age, and to the single-minded anxiety for the good times when

> Justice of law is held;
> The privilege of royalty
> Is safe, and all the barony
> Worshippèd is in its estate.
> The people stands in obeisánce
> Under the rule of governánce.

Chaucer is less explicit, and may have been too little of a politician by nature to care for preserving an outward consistency in his incidental remarks concerning the lower classes. In his *Clerk's Tale* he finds room for a very dubious commonplace about the "stormy people," its levity, untruthfulness, indiscretion, fickleness, and garrulity, and the folly of putting any trust in it. In his *Nun's Priest's Tale* he further enlivens one of the liveliest descriptions of a hue-and-cry ever put upon paper by a direct reference to the Peasants' Rebellion :—

> So hideous was the noise, ah *bencité!*
> That of a truth Jack Straw, and his meinie
> Not madë never shoutës half so shrill,
> When that they any Fleming meant to kill.

Assuredly, again, there is an unmistakably conservative tone in the *Ballad* purporting to have been sent by him *to King Richard*, with its refrain as to all being "lost for want of steadfastness," and its admonition to its sovereign to

> . . shew forth the sword of castigatión.

On the other hand, it would be unjust to leave unnoticed the passage, at once powerful and touching, in the so-called

Parson's Tale (the sermon which closes the *Canterbury Tales* as Chaucer left them), in which certain lords are reproached for taking of their bondmen *amercements*, "which might more reasonably be called extortions than *amercements*," while lords in general are commanded to be good to their thralls (serfs), because "those that they clept thralls, be God's people; for humble folks be Christ's friends; they be contubernially with the Lord." The solitary type, however, of the labouring man proper which Chaucer, in manifest remembrance of Langland's allegory, produces, is one which, beautiful and affecting as it is, has in it a flavour of the comfortable sentiment, that things are as they should be. This is—not of course the *Parson* himself, of which most significant character hereafter, but—the *Parson's* brother, the *Ploughman*. He is a true labourer and a good, religious and charitable in his life,—and always ready to pay his tithes. In short, he is a true Christian, but at the same time the ideal rather than the prototype, if one may so say, of the conservative working man.

Such were some, though of course some only, of the general currents of English public life in the latter half—Chaucer's half—of the fourteenth century. Its social features were naturally in accordance with the course of the national history. In the first place, the slow and painful process of amalgamation between the Normans and the English was still unfinished, though the reign of Edward III. went far towards completing what had rapidly advanced since the reigns of John and Henry III. By the middle of the fourteenth century English had become, or was just becoming, the common tongue of the whole nation. Among the political poems and songs preserved from the days of Edward III. and Richard II.,

not a single one composed on English soil is written in French. Parliament was opened by an English speech in the year 1363, and in the previous year the proceedings in the law courts were ordered to be conducted in the native tongue. Yet when Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*, it seems still to have continued the pedantic affectation of a profession for its members, like Chaucer's *Man of Law*, to introduce French law-terms into common conversation; so that it is natural enough to find the *Summoner* following suit, and interlarding his *Tale* with the Latin scraps picked up by him from the decrees and pleadings of the ecclesiastical courts. Meanwhile, manifold difficulties had delayed or interfered with the fusion between the two races, before the victory of the English language showed this fusion to have been in substance accomplished. One of these difficulties, which has been sometimes regarded as fundamental, has doubtless been exaggerated by national feeling on either side; but that it existed is not to be denied. Already in those ages the national character and temperament of French and English differed largely from one another; though the reasons why they so differed, remain a matter of argument. In a dialogue, dated from the middle of the fourteenth century, the French interlocutor attributes this difference to the respective national beverages: "*We* are nourished with the pure juice of the grape, while naught but the dregs is sold to the English, who will take anything for liquor that is liquid." The case is put with scarcely greater politeness by a living French critic of high repute, according to whom the English, still weighted down by Teutonic phlegm, were drunken gluttons, agitated at intervals by poetic enthusiasm, while the Normans, on the other hand, lightened by their transplantation, and by the admixture

of a variety of elements, already found the claims of *esprit* developing themselves within them. This is an explanation which explains nothing—least of all, the problem: why the lively strangers should have required the contact with insular phlegm in order to receive the creative impulse—why, in other words, Norman-French literature should have derived so enormous an advantage from the transplantation of Normans to English ground. But the evil days when the literary labours of Englishmen had been little better than bond-service to the tastes of their foreign masters had passed away, since the Norman barons had, from whatever motive, invited the commons of England to take a share with them in the national councils. After this, the question of the relations between the two languages, and the wider one of the relations between the two nationalities, could only be decided by the peaceable adjustment of the influences exercised by the one side upon the other. The Norman noble, his ideas, and the expression they found in forms of life and literature, had henceforth, so to speak, to stand on their merits; the days of their dominion as a matter of course had passed away.

Together with not a little of their political power, the Norman nobles of Chaucer's time had lost something of the traditions of their order. Chivalry had not quite come to an end with the Crusades; but it was a difficult task to maintain all its laws, written and unwritten, in these degenerate days. No laurels were any longer to be gained in the Holy Land; and though the campaigns of the great German Order against the pagans of Prussia and Lithuania attracted the service of many an English knight—in the middle of the century, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, fought there, as his grandson, afterwards King

Henry IV., did forty years later—yet the substitute was hardly adequate in kind. Of the great mediæval companies of Knights, the most famous had, early in the century, perished under charges which were undoubtedly in the main foul fictions, but at the same time were only too much in accord with facts betokening an unmistakable decay of the true spirit of chivalry; before the century closed, lawyers were rolling parchments in the halls of the Templars by the Thames. Thus, though the age of chivalry had not yet ended, its supremacy was already on the wane, and its ideal was growing dim. In the history of English chivalry the reign of Edward III. is memorable, not only for the foundation of our most illustrious order of knighthood, but likewise for many typical acts of knightly valour and courtesy, as well on the part of the King when in his better days, as on that of his heroic son. Yet it cannot be by accident that an undefinable air of the old-fashioned clings to that most delightful of all Chaucer's character-sketches, the *Knight* of the *Canterbury Tales*. His warlike deeds at Alexandria, in Prussia, and elsewhere, may be illustrated from those of more than one actual knight of the times; and the whole description of him seems founded on one by a French poet of King John of Bohemia, who had at least the external features of a knight of the old school. The chivalry, however, which was in fashion as the century advanced, was one outwardly far removed from the sturdy simplicity of Chaucer's *Knight*, and inwardly often rotten in more than one vital part. In show and splendour a higher point was probably reached in Edward III.'s than in any preceding reign. The extravagance in dress which prevailed in this period is too well known a characteristic of it to need dwelling upon. Sumptuary

laws in vain sought to restrain this foible; and it rose to such a pitch as even to oblige men, lest they should be precluded from indulging in gorgeous raiment, to abandon hospitality, a far more amiable species of excess. When the kinds of clothing respectively worn by the different classes served as distinctions of rank, the display of splendour in one class could hardly fail to provoke emulation in the others. The long-lived English love for "crying" colours shows itself amusingly enough in the early pictorial representations of several of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, though in floridity of apparel, as of speech, the youthful *Squire* bears away the bell:—

> Embroidered was he, as it were a mead
> All full of freshest flowers, white and red.

But of the artificiality and extravagance of the costumes of these times we have direct contemporary evidence, and loud contemporary complaints. Now, it is the jagged cut of the garments, punched and shredded by the man-milliner; now, the wide and high collars and the long-pointed boots, which attract the indignation of the moralist; at one time he inveighs against the "horrible disordinate scantness" of the clothing worn by gallants, at another against the "outrageous array" in which ladies love to exhibit their charms. The knights' horses are decked out with not less finery than are the knights themselves, with "curious harness, as in saddles and bridles, cruppers, and breast-plates, covered with precious clothing, and with bars and plates of gold and silver." And though it is hazardous to stigmatize the fashions of any one period as specially grotesque, yet it is significant of this age to find the reigning court beauty appearing at a tournament robed as Queen of the Sun; while even a lady from a manufacturing

district, the *Wife of Bath*, makes the most of her opportunities to be seen as well as to see. Her "kerchiefs" were "full fine" of texture, and weighed, one might be sworn, ten pound—

> That on a Sunday were upon her head.
> Her hosen too were of fine scarlet red,
> Full straight y-tied, and shoes full moist and new.
> . . . . . .
> Upon an ambler easily she sat,
> Y-wimpled well, and on her head a hat,
> As broad as is a buckler or a targe.

So, with a foot-mantle round her hips, and a pair of sharp spurs on her feet, she looked as defiant as any self-conscious Amazon of any period. It might perhaps be shown how in more important artistic efforts than fashions of dress this age displayed its aversion from simplicity and moderation. At all events, the love of the florid and overloaded declares itself in what we know concerning the social life of the nobility, as, for instance, we find that life reflected in the pages of Froissart, whose counts and lords seem neither to clothe themselves nor to feed themselves, nor to talk, pray, or swear like ordinary mortals. The *Vows of the Heron*, a poem of the earlier part of King Edward III.'s reign, contains a choice collection of strenuous knightly oaths; and in a humbler way the rest of the population very naturally imitated the parlance of their rulers, and in the words of the *Parson's Tale*, "dismembered Christ by soul, heart, bones, and body."

But there is one very much more important feature to be noticed in the social life of the nobility, for whom Chaucer's poetry must have largely replaced the French verse in which they had formerly delighted. The relation between knight and lady plays a great part in the history

as well as in the literature of the later Plantagenet period; and incontestably its conceptions of this relation still retained much of the pure sentiment belonging to the best and most fervent times of Christian chivalry. The highest religious expression which has ever been given to man's sense of woman's mission, as his life's comfort and crown, was still a universally dominant belief. To the Blessed Virgin, King Edward III. dedicated his principal religious foundation; and Chaucer, to whatever extent his opinions or sentiments may have been in accordance with ideas of ecclesiastical reform, displays a pious devotion towards the foremost Saint of the Church. The lyric entitled the *Praise of Women*, in which she is enthusiastically recognized as the representative of the whole of her sex, is generally rejected as not Chaucer's; but the elaborate "Orison to the Holy Virgin," beginning

Mother of God, and Virgin undefiled,

seems to be correctly described as *Oratio Gallfridi Chaucer*; and in *Chaucer's A. B. C., called La Prière de Notre Dame*, a translation by him from a French original, we have a long address to the Blessed Virgin in twenty-three stanzas, each of which begins with one of the letters of the alphabet arranged in proper succession. Nor, apart from this religious sentiment, had men yet altogether lost sight of the ideal of true knightly love, destined though this ideal was to be obscured in the course of time, until at last the *Mort d'Arthure* was the favourite literary nourishment of the minions and mistresses of Edward IV.'s degenerate days. In his *Book of the Duchess* Chaucer has left us a picture of true knightly love, together with one of true maiden purity. The lady celebrated in this poem was loth, merely for the sake of coquetting

with their exploits, to send her knights upon errands of chivalry—

> into Walachy,
> To Prussia, and to Tartary,
> To Alexandria or Turkéy.

And doubtless there was many a gentle knight or squire to whom might have been applied the description given by the heroine of Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressid* of her lover, and of that which attracted her in him:—

> For trust ye well that your estate royál,
> Nor vain delight, nor only worthiness
> Of you in war or tourney martial,
> Nor pomp, array, nobility, richés,
> Of these none made me rue on your distress;
> *But moral virtue, grounded upon truth,*
> *That was the cause I first had on you ruth.*
>
> And gentle heart, and manhood that ye had,
> And that ye had (as méthought) in despite
> Everything that tended unto bad,
> As rudeness, and as popular appetite,
> And that your reason bridled your delight,
> 'Twas these did make 'bove every creatúre
> That I was yours, and shall while I may 'dure.

And if true affection under the law still secured the sympathy of the better-balanced part of society, so the vice of those who made war upon female virtue, or the insolence of those who falsely boasted of their conquests, still incurred its resentment. Among the companies which in the *House of Fame* sought the favour of its mistress, Chaucer vigorously satirises the would-be-lady-killers, who were content with the *reputation* of accomplished seducers; and in *Troilus and Cressid* a shrewd observer exclaims with the utmost vivacity against

Such sort of folk,—what shall I clepe them? what?
That vaunt themselves of women, and by name,
That yet to them ne'er promised this or that,
Nor knew them more, in sooth, than mine old hat.

The same easy but sagacious philosopher (Pandarus) observes, that the harm which is in this world springs as often from folly as from malice. But a deeper feeling animates the lament of the "good Alceste," in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, that among men the betrayal of women is now "held a game." So indisputably it was already often esteemed, in too close an accordance with examples set in the highest places in the land. If we are to credit an old tradition, a poem in which Chaucer narrates the amours of Mars and Venus was written by him at the request of John of Gaunt, to celebrate the adultery of the duke's sister-in-law with a nobleman, to whom the injured kinsman afterwards married one of his own daughters! But nowhere was the deterioration of sentiment on this head more strongly typified than in Edward III. himself. The King, who (if the pleasing tale be true which gave rise to some beautiful scenes in an old English drama) had in his early days royally renounced an unlawful passion for the fair Countess of Salisbury, came to be accused of at once violating his conjugal duty and neglecting his military glory for the sake of strange women's charms. The founder of the Order of the Garter —the device of which enjoined purity even of thought as a principle of conduct—died in the hands of a rapacious courtesan. Thus, in England, as in France, the ascendancy is gained by ignobler views concerning the relation between the sexes,—a relation to which the whole system of chivalry owed a great part of its vitality, and on the view of which prevailing in the most influential class of

any nation, the social health of that nation must inevitably in no small measure depend. Meanwhile, the artificialities by means of which in France, up to the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was sought to keep alive an organised system of sentimentality in the social dealings between gentlemen and ladies, likewise found admission in England, but only in a modified degree. Here the fashion in question asserted itself only, or chiefly, in our poetic literature, and in the adoption by it of such fancies as the praise and worship of the daisy, with which we meet in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, and in the *Flower and the Leaf*, a most pleasing poem (suggested by a French model), which it is unfortunately no longer possible to number among his genuine works. The poem of the *Court of Love*, which was likewise long erroneously attributed to him, may be the original work of an English author; but in any case its main contents are a mere adaptation of a peculiar outgrowth on a foreign soil of conceptions common to chivalry in general.

Of another force, which in the Middle Ages shared with chivalry (though not with it alone) the empire over the minds of men, it would certainly be rash to assert that its day was passing away in the latter half of the fourteenth century. It has indeed been pointed out that the date at which Wyclif's career as a reformer may be said to have begun almost coincides with that of the climax and first decline of feudal chivalry in England. But, without seeking to interpret coincidences, we know that, though the influence of the Christian Church and that of its Roman branch in particular, has asserted and re-asserted itself in various ways and degrees in various ages, yet in England, as elsewhere, the epoch

of its moral omnipotence had come to an end many generations before the disruption of its external framework. In the fourteenth century men had long ceased to look for the mediation of the Church between an overbearing Crown and a baronage and commonalty eager for the maintenance of their rights or for the assertion of their claims. On the other hand, the conflicts which still recurred between the temporal power and the Church had as little reference as ever to spiritual concerns. Undoubtedly, the authority of the Church over the minds of the people still depended in the main upon the spiritual influence she exercised over them; and the desire for a reformation of the Church, which was already making itself felt in a gradually widening sphere, was by the great majority of those who cherished it held perfectly compatible with a recognition of her authority. The world, it has been well said, needed an enquiry extending over three centuries, in order to learn to walk without the aid of the Church of Rome. Wyclif, who sought to emancipate the human conscience from reliance upon any earthly authority intermediate between the soul and its Maker, reckoned without his generation; and few, except those with whom audacity took the place of argument, followed him to the extreme results of his speculations. The Great Schism rather stayed than promoted the growth of an English feeling against Rome, since it was now no longer necessary to acknowledge a Pope who seemed the henchman of the arch-foe across the narrow seas.

But although the progress of English sentiment towards the desire for liberation from Rome was to be interrupted by a long and seemingly decisive reaction, yet in the fourteenth as in the sixteenth century the

most active cause of the alienation of the people from the Church was the conduct of the representatives of the Church themselves. The Reformation has most appropriately retained in history a name at first unsuspiciously applied to the removal of abuses in the ecclesiastical administration and in the life of the clergy. What aid could be derived by those who really hungered for spiritual food, or what strength could accrue to the thoughtless faith of the light-hearted majority, from many of the most common varieties of the English ecclesiastic of the later Middle Ages? Apart from the Italian and other foreign holders of English benefices, who left their flocks to be tended by deputy, and to be shorn by an army of the most offensive kind of tax-gatherers, the native clergy included many species, but among them few which, to the popular eye, seemed to embody a high ideal of religious life. The times had by no means come to an end when many of the higher clergy sought to vie with the lay lords in warlike prowess. Perhaps the martial Bishop of Norwich, who, after persecuting the heretics at home, had commanded an army of crusaders in Flanders, levied on behalf of Pope Urban VI. against the anti-Pope Clement VII. and his adherents, was in the poet Gower's mind when he complains that while

> the law is rulèd so,
> That clerks unto the war intend,
> I wot not how they should amend
> The woeful world in other things,
> And so make peace between the kings
> After the law of charity,
> Which is the duty properly
> Belonging unto the priesthóod.

A more general complaint, however, was that directing itself against the extravagance and luxury of life in which

the dignified clergy indulged. The cost of these unspiritual pleasures the great prelates had ample means for defraying in the revenues of their sees; while lesser dignitaries had to be active in levying their dues or the fines of their courts, lest everything should flow into the receptacles of their superiors. So in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale* an unfriendly Regular says of an archdeacon,—

> For smallē tithes and for small offering
> He made the people piteously to sing.
> For ere the bishop caught them on his hook,
> They were down in the archědeacon's book.

As a matter of course, the worthy who filled the office of *Summoner* to the court of the archdeacon in question, had a keen eye for the profitable improprieties subject to its penalties, and was aided in his efforts by the professional abettors of vice whom he kept "ready to his hand." Nor is it strange that the undisguised worldliness of many members of the clerical profession should have reproduced itself in other lay subordinates, even in the parish clerks, at all times apt to copy their betters, though we would fain hope such was not the case with the parish clerk, "the jolly Absalom" of the *Miller's Tale*. The love of gold had corrupted the acknowledged chief guardians of incorruptible treasures, even though few may have avowed this love as openly as the "idle" *Canon*, whose *Yeoman* had so strange a tale to tell to the Canterbury pilgrims concerning his master's absorbing devotion to the problem of the multiplication of gold. To what a point the popular discontent with the vices of the higher secular clergy had advanced in the last decennium of the century, may be seen from the poem called the *Complaint of the Ploughman*—a production pretending to be by the same hand which in the *Vision* had dwelt on the sufferings of the people and

on the sinfulness of the ruling classes. Justly or unjustly, the indictment was brought against the priests of being the agents of every evil influence among the people, the soldiers of an army of which the true head was not God, but Belial.

In earlier days the Church had known how to compensate the people for the secular clergy's neglect, or imperfect performance, of its duties. But in no respect had the ecclesiastical world more changed than in this. The older monastic Orders had long since lost themselves in unconcealed worldliness; how, for instance, had the Benedictines changed their character since the remote times when their Order had been the principal agent in revivifying the religion of the land! Now, they were taunted with their very name, as having been bestowed upon them "by antiphrasis," i. e. by contraries. From many of their monasteries, and from the inmates who dwelt in these comfortable halls, had vanished even all pretence of disguise. Chaucer's *Monk* paid no attention to the rule of St. Benedict, and of his disciple St. Maur,

> Because that it was old and somewhat strait;

and preferred to fall in with the notions of later times. He was an "outrider, that loved venery," and whom his tastes and capabilities would have well qualified for the dignified post of abbot. He had "full many a dainty horse" in his stable, and the swiftest of greyhounds to boot; and rode forth gaily, clad in superfine furs and a hood elegantly fastened with a gold pin, and tied into a love-knot at the "greater end," while the bridle of his steed jingled as if its rider had been as good a knight as any of them—this last, by the way, a mark of ostentation against which Wyclif takes occasion specially to inveigh.

This Monk (and Chaucer must say that he was wise in his generation) could not understand why he should study books and unhinge his mind by the effort; life was not worth having at the price; and no one knew better to what use to put the pleasing gift of existence. Hence mine host of the Tabard, a very competent critic, had reason for the opinion which he communicated to the Monk :—

> It is a noble pasture where thou go'st;
> Thou art not like a penitent or ghost.

In the Orders of nuns, certain corresponding features were becoming usual. But little in the way of religious guidance could fall to the lot of a sisterhood presided over by such a *Prioress* as Chaucer's Madame Eglantine, whose mind—possibly because her nunnery fulfilled the functions of a finishing school for young ladies—was mainly devoted to French and deportment, or by such a one as the historical Lady Juliana Berners, of a rather later date, whose leisure hours produced treatises on hunting and hawking, and who would probably have on behalf of her own sex echoed the *Monk's* contempt for the prejudice against the participation of the Religious in field-sports :—

> He gave not for that text a pullèd hen
> That saith, that hunters be no holy men.

On the other hand, neither did the Mendicant Orders, instituted at a later date purposely to supply what the older Orders, as well as the secular clergy, seemed to have grown incapable of furnishing, any longer satisfy the reason of their being. In the fourteenth century the Dominicans or Black Friars, who at London dwelt in such magnificence that king and Parliament often preferred a sojourn with them to abiding at Westminster, had in general grown

accustomed to concentrate their activity upon the spiritual direction of the higher classes. But though they counted among them Englishmen of eminence (one of these was Chaucer's friend, "the philosophical Strode"), they in truth never played a more than secondary part in this country, to whose soil the delicate machinery of the Inquisition, of which they were by choice the managers, was never congenial. Of far greater importance for the population of England at large was the Order of the Franciscans or (as they were here wont to call themselves or to be called) Minorites or Grey Friars. To them the poor had habitually looked for domestic ministrations, and for the inspiring and consoling eloquence of the pulpit; and they had carried their labours into the midst of the suffering population, not afraid of association with that poverty which they were by their vow themselves bound to espouse, or of contact with the horrors of leprosy and the plague. Departing from the short-sighted policy of their illustrious founder, they had become a learned, as well as a ministering and preaching Order; and it was precisely from among them that, at Oxford and elsewhere, sprang a succession of learned monks, whose names are inseparably connected with some of the earliest English growths of philosophical speculation and scientific research. Nor is it possible to doubt that in the middle of the thirteenth century the monks of this Order at Oxford had exercised an appreciable influence upon the beginnings of a political struggle of unequalled importance for the progress of our constitutional life. But in the Franciscans also the fourteenth century witnessed a change, which may be described as a gradual loss of the qualities for which they had been honourably distinguished; and in England, as elsewhere, the spirit of the words which Dante puts into the mouth

of St. Francis of Assisi was being verified by his degenerate children :—

> So soft is flesh of mortals, that on earth
> A good beginning doth no longer last
> Than while an oak may bring its fruit to birth.

Outwardly, indeed, the Grey Friars might still often seem what their predecessors had been, and might thus retain a powerful influence over the unthinking crowd, and to sheer worldlings appear as heretofore to represent a troublesome *memento* of unexciting religious obligations; "Preach not." says Chaucer's *Host*,

> "as friars do in Lent,
> That they for our old sins may make us weep,
> Nor in such wise thy tale make us to sleep."

But in general men were beginning to suspect the motives as well as to deride the practices of the Friars, to accuse them of lying against St. Francis, and to desiderate for them an actual abode of fire, resembling that of which in their favourite religious shows they were wont to present the mimic semblance to the multitude. It was they who became in England as elsewhere the purveyors of charms and the organisers of pious frauds, while the learning for which their Order had been famous was withering away into the yellow leaf of scholasticism. The Friar in general became the common butt of literary satire; and though the populace still remained true to its favourite guides, a reaction was taking place in favour of the secular as against the regular clergy in the sympathies of the higher classes, and in the spheres of society most open to intellectual influences. The monks and the London multitude were at one time united against John of Gaunt, but it was from the ranks of the secular clergy that Wyclif came

forth to challenge the ascendancy of Franciscan scholasticism in his university. Meanwhile the poet who in the *Poor Parson of the Town* paints his ideal of a Christian minister—simple, poor, and devoted to his holy work,—has nothing but contempt for the friars at large, and for the whole machinery worked by them, half effete, and half spasmodic, and altogether sham. In King Arthur's time, says that accurate and unprejudiced observer the *Wife of Bath*, the land was filled with fairies—*now* it is filled with friars as thick as motes in the beam of the sun. Among them there is the *Pardoner*, *i. e.* seller of pardons (indulgences)—with his "haughty" sermons, delivered "by rote" to congregation after congregation in the self-same words, and everywhere accompanied by the self-same tricks of anecdotes and jokes,—with his Papal credentials, and with the pardons he has brought from Rome "all hot,"—and with precious relics to rejoice the hearts of the faithful, and to fill his own pockets with the proceeds: to wit, a pillowcase covered with the veil of Our Lady, and a piece of the sail of the ship in which St. Peter went out fishing on the Lake of Gennesareth. This worthy, who lays bare his own motives with unparalleled cynical brutality, is manifestly drawn from the life;—or the portrait could not have been accepted which was presented alike by Chaucer, and by his contemporary Langland, and (a century and a half later) in the plagiarism of the orthodox Catholic John Heywood. There, again, is the *Limitour*, a friar licensed to beg, and to hear confession and grant absolution, within the *limits* of a certain district. He is described by Chaucer with so much humour, that one can hardly suspect much exaggeration in the sketch. In him we have the truly popular ecclesiastic who springs from the people, lives among the people, and feels with the people. He is the

true friend of the poor, and being such, has, as one might say, his finger in every pie: for "a fly and a friar will fall in every dish and every business." His readily-proffered arbitration settles the differences of the humbler classes at the "love-days," a favourite popular practice noted already in the *Vision* of Langland; nor is he a niggard of the mercies which he is privileged to dispense:—

> Full sweetly did he hear confessión,
> And pleasant was his absolutión.
> He was an easy man to give penánce,
> Whereso wist to have a good pittánce;
> For unto a poor Order for to give,
> Is signë that a man is well y-shrive;
> For if he gave, he durstë make a vaunt
> He wistë that a man was répentant.
> For many a man so hard is of his heart
> He can not weep although he sorely smart.
> Therefore instead of weeping and of prayers
> Men must give silver to the poorë Freres.

Already in the French *Roman de la Rose* the rivalry between the Friars and the Parish Priests is the theme of much satire, evidently unfavourable to the former and favourable to the latter; but in England, where Langland likewise dwells upon the jealousy between them, it was specially accentuated by the assaults of Wyclif upon the Mendicant Orders. (Wyclif's Simple Priests, who at first ministered with the approval of the Bishops, differed from the Mendicants, first by not being beggars, and secondly by being poor.) They might perhaps have themselves ultimately played the part of a new Order in England, had not Wyclif himself by rejecting the cardinal dogma of the Church severed these followers of his from its organism and brought about their suppression. The question as to Chaucer's own attitude towards

the Wycliffite movement will be more conveniently touched upon below; but the tone is unmistakable of the references or allusions to Lollardry which he occasionally introduces into the mouth of his *Host*, whose voice is that *vox populi* which the upper and middle classes so often arrogate to themselves. Whatever those classes might desire, it was not to have "cockle sown" by unauthorised intruders "in the corn" of their ordinary instruction. Thus there is a tone of genuine attachment to the "vested interest" principle, and of aversion from all such interlopers as lay preachers and the like, in the *Host's* exclamation, uttered after the *Reeve* has been (in his own style) "sermoning" on the topic of old age:--

> What availeth all this wit?
> What? should we speak all day of Holy Writ?
> The devil surely made a reeve to preach;

for which he is as well suited as a cobbler would be for turning mariner or physician!

Thus, then, in the England of Chaucer's days we find the Church still in possession of vast temporal wealth and of great power and privileges,—as well as of means for enforcing unity of profession which the legislation of the Lancastrian dynasty, stimulated by the prevailing fears of heresy, was still further to increase. On the other hand, we find the influence of the clergy over the minds of the people diminished though not extinguished. This was, in the case of the higher secular clergy, partly attributable to their self-indulgence or neglect of their functions, partly to their having been largely superseded by the Regulars in the control of the religious life of the people. The Orders we find no longer at the height of their influence, but still powerful by their wealth, their numbers, their

traditional hold upon the lower classes, and their determination to retain this hold even by habitually resorting to the most dubious of methods. Lastly, we find in the lower secular clergy, and doubtless may also assume it to have lingered among some of the regular, some of the salt left whose savour consists in a single-minded and humble resolution to maintain the highest standard of a religious life. But such "clerks" as these are at no times the most easily found, because it is not they who are always running "unto London, unto St. Paul's" on urgent private affairs. What wonder, that the real teaching of Wyclif, of which the full significance could hardly be understood, but by a select few, should have virtually fallen dead upon his generation, to which the various agitations and agitators, often mingling ideas of religious reform with social and political grievances, seemed to be identical in character and alike to require suppression! In truth, of course, these movements and their agents were often very different from one another in their ends, and were not to be suppressed by the same processes.

It should not be forgotten that in this century learning was, though only very gradually, ceasing to be a possession of the clergy alone. Much doubt remains as to the extent of education—if a little reading and less writing deserve the name—among the higher classes in this period of our national life. A cheering sign appears in the circumstance that the legal deeds of this age begin to bear signatures, and a reference to John of Trevisa would bear out Hallam's conjecture, that in the year 1400 "the average instruction of an English gentleman of the first class would comprehend common reading and writing, a considerable knowledge of French, and a slight tincture of Latin." Certain it is that in this century the barren teaching of

the Universities advanced but little towards the true end of all academical teaching—the encouragement and spread of the highest forms of national culture. To what use could a gentleman of Edward III.'s or Richard II.'s day have put the acquirements of a *Clerk of Oxenford* in Aristotelian logic, supplemented perhaps by a knowledge of Priscian, and the rhetorical works of Cicero? Chaucer's scholar, however much his learned modesty of manner and sententious brevity of speech may commend him to our sympathy and taste, is a man wholly out of the world in which he lives, though a dependent on its charity even for the means with which to purchase more of his beloved books. Probably no trustworthier conclusions as to the literary learning and studies of those days are to be derived from any other source than from a comparison of the few catalogues of contemporary libraries remaining to us; and these help to show that the century was approaching its close before a few sparse rays of the first dawn of the Italian Renascence reached England. But this ray was communicated neither through the clergy nor through the Universities; and such influence as was exercised by it upon the national mind, was directly due to profane poets,—men of the world, who like Chaucer quoted authorities even more abundantly than they used them, and made some of their happiest discoveries after the fashion in which the *Oxford Clerk* came across Petrarch's Latin version of the story of Patient Grissel: as it were by accident. There is only too ample a justification for leaving aside the records of the history of learning in England during the latter half of the fourteenth century in any sketch of the main influences which in that period determined or affected the national progress. It was not by his theological learning

that Wyclif was brought into living contact with the current of popular thought and feeling. The Universities were thriving exceedingly on the scholastic glories of previous ages; but the ascendancy was passing away to which Oxford had attained over Paris—during the earlier middle ages, and again in the fifteenth century until the advent of the Renascence, the central university of Europe in the favourite study of scholastic philosophy and theology.

But we must turn from particular classes and ranks of men to the whole body of the population, exclusively of that great section of it which unhappily lay outside the observation of any but a very few writers—whether poets or historians. In the people at large we may, indeed, easily discern in this period the signs of an advance towards that self-government which is the true foundation of our national greatness. But on the other hand it is impossible not to observe how, while the moral ideas of the people were still under the control of the Church, the State in its turn still ubiquitously interfered in the settlement of the conditions of social existence, fixing prices, controlling personal expenditure, regulating wages. Not until England had fully attained to the character of a commercial country, which it was coming gradually to assume, did its inhabitants begin to understand the value of that which has gradually come to distinguish ours among the nations of Europe, viz. the right of individual Englishmen, as well as of the English people, to manage their own affairs for themselves. This may help to explain what can hardly fail to strike a reader of Chaucer and of the few contemporary remains of our literature. About our national life in this period, both in its virtues and in its vices, there is something—it matters little whether we call it—childlike or childish; in its "apert" if not in

its "privy" sides it lacks the seriousness belonging to men and to generations, who have learnt to control themselves, instead of relying on the control of others.

In illustration of this assertion, appeal might be made to several of the most salient features in the social life of the period. The extravagant expenditure in dress, fostered by a love of pageantry of various kinds encouraged by both chivalry and the Church, has been already referred to; it was by no means distinctive of any one class of the population. Among the friars who went about preaching homilies on the people's favourite vices some humorous rogues may, like the *Pardoner* of the *Canterbury Tales*, have made a point of treating their own favourite vice as their one and unchangeable text:—

> My theme is always one, and ever was:
> *Radix malorum est cupiditas.*

But others preferred to dwell on specifically lay sins; and these moralists occasionally attributed to the love of expenditure on dress the impoverishment of the kingdom, forgetting in their ignorance of political economy and defiance of common sense, that this result was really due to the endless foreign wars. Yet in contrast with the pomp and ceremony of life, upon which so great an amount of money and time and thought was wasted, are noticeable shortcomings by no means uncommon in the case of undeveloped civilisations (as for instance among the most typically childish or childlike nationalities of the Europe of our own day), viz. discomfort and uncleanliness of all sorts. To this may be added the excessive fondness for sports and pastimes of all kinds, in which nations are aptest to indulge before or after the era of their highest efforts,—the desire to make life one long holiday, dividing

it between tournaments and the dalliance of courts of love, or between archery-meetings (skilfully substituted by royal command for less useful exercises), and the seductive company of "tumblers," "fruiterers," and "waferers." Furthermore, one may notice in all classes a far from eradicated inclination to superstitions of every kind,—whether those encouraged or those discouraged [1] by the Church,—an inclination unfortunately fostered rather than checked by the uncertain gropings of contemporary science. Hence, the credulous acceptance of relics like those sold by the *Pardoner*, and of legends like those related to Chaucer's Pilgrims by the *Prioress* (one of the numerous repetitions of a cruel calumny against the Jews), and by the *Second Nun* (the supra-sensual story of Saint Cecilia). Hence, on the other hand, the greedy hunger for the marvels of astrology and alchemy, notwithstanding the growing scepticism even of members of a class represented by Chaucer's *Franklin* towards

> such folly
> As in our days is not held worth a fly,

and notwithstanding the exposure of fraud by repentant or sickened accomplices, such as the gold-making *Canon's Yeoman*. Hence, again, the vitality of such quasi-scientific fancies as the magic mirror, of which miraculous instrument the *Squire's* "half-told story" describes a specimen, referring to the incontestable authority of Aristotle and others, who write "in their lives" concerning quaint mirrors and perspective glasses, as is well known to those who have "heard the books" of these sages. Hence, finally, the cor-

[1] For holy Church's faith, in our belief,
Suffereth no illusion us to grieve.
The Franklin's Tale.

responding tendency to eschew the consideration of serious religious questions, and to leave them to clerks, as if they were crabbed problems of theology. For in truth, while the most fertile and fertilising ideas of the Middle Ages had exhausted, or were rapidly coming to exhaust, their influence upon the people, the forms of the doctrines of the Church—even of the most stimulative as well as of the most solemn among them,—had grown hard and stiff. To those who received if not to those who taught these doctrines they seemed alike lifeless, unless translated into the terms of the merest earthly transactions or the language of purely human relations. And thus, paradoxical as it might seem, cool-headed and conscientious rulers of the Church thought themselves on occasion called upon to restrain rather than to stimulate the religious ardour of the multitude—fed as the flame was by very various materials. Perhaps no more characteristic narrative has come down to us from the age of the poet of the *Canterbury Tales*, than the story of Bishop (afterwards Archbishop) Sudbury and the Canterbury Pilgrims. In the year 1370 the land was agitated through its length and breadth, on the occasion of the fourth jubilee of the national saint, Thomas the Martyr. The pilgrims were streaming in numbers along the familiar Kentish road, when, on the very vigil of the feast, one of their companies was accidentally met by the Bishop of London. They demanded his blessing; but to their astonishment and indignation he seized the occasion to read a lesson to the crowd on the uselessness to unrepentant sinners of the plenary indulgences, for the sake of which they were wending their way to the Martyr's shrine. The rage of the multitude found a mouthpiece in a soldier, who loudly upbraided the Bishop for stirring up the people against

St. Thomas, and warned him that a shameful death would befall him in consequence. The multitude shouted *Amen* —and one is left to wonder whether any of the pious pilgrims who resented Bishop Sudbury's manly truthfulness, swelled the mob which eleven years later butchered "the plunderer," as it called him, "of the Commons." It is such glimpses as this which show us how important the Church had become towards the people. Worse was to ensue before the better came; in the meantime, the nation was in that stage of its existence when the innocence of the child was fast losing itself, without the self-control of the man having yet taken its place.

But the heart of England was sound the while. The national spirit of enterprise was not dead in any class, from knight to shipman; and faithfulness and chastity in woman were still esteemed the highest though not the universal virtues of her sex. The value of such evidence as the mind of a great poet speaking in his works furnishes for a knowledge of the times to which he belongs is inestimable. For it shows us what has survived, as well as what was doomed to decay, in the life of the nation with which that mind was in sensitive sympathy. And it therefore seemed not inappropriate to approach, in the first instance, from this point of view the subject of this biographical essay,—Chaucer, "the poet of the dawn." For in him there are many things significant of the age of transition in which he lived; in him the mixture of Frenchman and Englishman is still in a sense incomplete, as that of their language is in the diction of his poems. His gaiety of heart is hardly English; nor is his willing (though, to be sure, not invariably unquestioning) acceptance of forms into the inner meaning of which he does not greatly vex his soul by entering; nor his airy way of

ridiculing what he has no intention of helping to overthrow; nor his light unconcern in the question whether he is, or is not, an immoral writer. Or, at least, in all of these things he has no share in qualities and tendencies, which influences and conflicts unknown to and unforeseen by him may be safely said to have ultimately made characteristic of Englishmen. But he *is* English in his freedom and frankness of spirit; in his manliness of mind; in his preference for the good in things as they are to the good in things as they might be; in his loyalty, his piety, his truthfulness. Of the great movement which was to mould the national character for at least a long series of generations he displays no serious foreknowledge; and of the elements already preparing to affect the course of that movement he shows a very incomplete consciousness. But of the health and strength which, after struggles many and various, made that movement possible and made it victorious, he, more than any one of his contemporaries, is the living type and the speaking witness. Thus, like the times to which he belongs, he stands half in and half out of the Middle Ages, half in and half out of a phase of our national life, which we can never hope to understand more than partially and imperfectly. And it is this, taken together with the fact that he is the first English poet to read whom is to enjoy him, and that he garnished not only our language but our literature with blossoms still adorning them in vernal freshness,—which makes Chaucer's figure so unique a one in the gallery of our great English writers, and gives to his works an interest so inexhaustible for the historical as well as for the literary student.

CHAPTER II.

CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS.

SOMETHING has been already said as to the conflict of opinion concerning the period of Geoffrey Chaucer's birth, the precise date of which is very unlikely ever to be ascertained. A better fortune has attended the anxious enquiries which in his case, as in those of other great men have been directed to the very secondary question of ancestry and descent,—a question to which, in the abstract at all events, no man ever attached less importance than he. Although the name *Chaucer* is (according to Thynne), to be found on the lists of Battle Abbey, this no more proves that the poet himself came of "high parage," than the reverse is to be concluded from the nature of his coat-of-arms, which Speght thought must have been taken out of the 27th and 28th Propositions of the First Book of Euclid. Many a warrior of the Norman Conquest was known to his comrades only by the name of the trade which he had plied in some French or Flemish town, before he attached himself a volunteer to Duke William's holy and lucrative expedition; and it is doubtful whether even in the fourteenth century the name *Le Chaucer* is, wherever it occurs in London, used as a surname, or whether in some instances it is not merely a designation of the owner's trade. Thus we should not be justified in

assuming a French origin for the family from which Richard le Chaucer, whom we know to have been the poet's grandfather, was descended. Whether or not he was at any time a shoemaker (*chaucier*, maker of *chausses*), and accordingly belonged to a gentle craft otherwise not unassociated with the history of poetry, Richard was a citizen of London, and vintner, like his son John after him. John Chaucer, whose wife's Christian name may be with tolerable safety set down as Agnes, owned a house in Thames Street, London, not far from the arch on which modern pilgrims pass by rail to Canterbury or beyond, and in the neighbourhood of the great bridge, which in Chaucer's own day, emptied its travellers on their errands, sacred or profane, into the great Southern road, the *Via Appia* of England. The house afterwards descended to John's son, GEOFFREY, who released his right to it by deed in the year 1380. Chaucer's father was probably a man of some substance, the most usual personal recommendation to great people in one of his class. For he was at least temporarily connected with the Court, inasmuch as he attended King Edward III. and Queen Philippa on the memorable journey to Flanders and Germany, in the course of which the English monarch was proclaimed Vicar of the Holy Roman Empire on the left bank of the Rhine. John Chaucer died in 1366, and in course of time his widow married another citizen and vintner. Thomas Heyroun, John Chaucer's brother of the half-blood, was likewise a member of the same trade; so that the young Geoffrey was certainly not brought up in an atmosphere of abstinence. The *Host* of the *Canterbury Tales*, though he takes his name from an actual personage, may therefore have in him touches of a family portrait; but Chaucer himself nowhere displays any traces

of a hereditary devotion to Bacchus, and makes so experienced a practitioner as the *Pardoner* the mouthpiece of as witty an invective against drunkenness as has been uttered by any assailant of our existing licensing laws. Chaucer's own practice as well as his opinion on this head is sufficiently expressed in the characteristic words he puts into the mouth of Cressid :—

> In every thing, I wot, there lies measúre :
> For though a man forbid all drunkenness,
> He biddeth not that every créature
> Be drinkless altogether, as I guess.

Of Geoffrey Chaucer we know nothing whatever from the day of his birth (whenever it befell) to the year 1357. His earlier biographers, who supposed him to have been born in 1328, had accordingly a fair field open for conjecture and speculation. Here it must suffice to risk the asseveration, that he cannot have accompanied his father to Cologne in 1338, and on that occasion have been first "taken notice of" by king and queen, if he was not born till two or more years afterwards. If, on the other hand, he was born in 1328, both events *may* have taken place. On neither supposition is there any reason for believing that he studied at one—or at both—of our English Universities. The poem cannot be accepted as Chaucerian, the author of which (very possibly by a mere dramatic assumption) declares :—

> Philogenet I call'd am far and near,
> Of Cambridge clerk ;

nor can any weight be attached to the circumstance that the *Clerk*, who is one of the most delightful figures among the Canterbury Pilgrims, is an Oxonian. The enticing enquiry as to *which* of the sister Universities may claim

Chaucer as her own must, therefore, be allowed to drop, together with the subsidiary question, whether stronger evidence of local colouring is furnished by the *Miller's* picture of the life of a poor scholar in lodgings at Oxford, or by the *Reeve's* rival narrative of the results of a Trumpington walk taken by two undergraduates of the "Soler Hall" at Cambridge. Equally baseless is the supposition of one of Chaucer's earliest biographers, that he completed his academical studies at Paris—and equally futile the concomitant fiction that in France "he acquired much applause by his literary exercises." Finally, we have the tradition that he was a member of the Inner Temple—which is a conclusion deduced from a piece of genial scandal as to a record having been seen in that Inn of a fine imposed upon him for beating a friar in Fleet-street. This story was early placed by Thynne on the horns of a sufficiently decisive dilemma: in the days of Chaucer's youth, lawyers had not yet been admitted into the Temple; and in the days of his maturity he is not very likely to have been found engaged in battery in a London thoroughfare.

We now desert the region of groundless conjecture, in order with the year 1357 to arrive at a firm though not very broad footing of facts. In this year, "Geoffrey Chaucer" (whom it would be too great an effort of scepticism to suppose to have been merely a namesake of the poet) is mentioned in the Household Book of Elizabeth Countess of Ulster, wife of Prince Lionel (third son of King Edward III., and afterwards Duke of Clarence), as a recipient of certain articles of apparel. Two similar notices of his name occur up to the year 1359. He is hence concluded to have belonged to Prince Lionel's establishment as squire or page to the Lady Elizabeth; and it was

probably in the Prince's retinue that he took part in the expedition of King Edward III. into France, which began at the close of the year 1359 with the ineffectual siege of Rheims, and in the next year, after a futile attempt upon Paris, ended with the compromise of the Peace of Brétigny. In the course of this campaign Chaucer was taken prisoner; but he was released without much loss of time, as appears by a document bearing date March 1st, 1360, in which the king contributes the sum of 16*l.* for Chaucer's ransom. We may therefore conclude that he missed the march upon Paris, and the sufferings undergone by the English army on their road thence to Chartres—the most exciting experiences of an inglorious campaign; and that he was actually set free by the Peace. When, in the year 1367, we next meet with his name in authentic records, his earliest known patron, the Lady Elizabeth, is dead; and he has passed out of the service of Prince Lionel into that of King Edward himself, as Valet of whose Chamber or household he receives a yearly salary for life of twenty marks, for his former and future services. Very possibly he had quitted Prince Lionel's service when in 1361 that Prince had by reason of his marriage with the heiress of Ulster been appointed to the Irish government by his father, who was supposed at one time to have destined him for the Scottish throne.

Concerning the doings of Chaucer in the interval between his liberation from his French captivity and the first notice of him as Valet of the King's Chamber we know nothing at all. During these years, however, no less important a personal event than his marriage was by earlier biographers supposed to have occurred. On the other hand, according to the view which commends itself

to several eminent living commentators of the poet, it was not courtship and marriage, but a hopeless and unrequited passion, which absorbed these years of his life. Certain stanzas in which, as they think, he gave utterance to this passion are by them ascribed to one of these years; so that if their view were correct, the poem in question would have to be regarded as the earliest of his extant productions. The problem which we have indicated must detain us for a moment.

It is attested by documentary evidence, that in the year 1374, Chaucer had a wife by name Philippa, who had been in the service of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and of his Duchess (doubtless his second wife, Constance), as well as in that of his mother the good Queen Philippa, and who, on several occasions afterwards, besides special new year's gifts of silver-gilt cups from the Duke, received her annual pension of ten marks through her husband. It is likewise proved that, in 1366, a pension of ten marks was granted to *a* Philippa Chaucer, one of the ladies of the Queen's Chamber. Obviously, it is a highly probable assumption that these two Philippa Chaucers were one and the same person; but in the absence of any direct proof it is impossible to affirm as certain, or to deny as demonstrably untrue, that the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 owed her surname to marriage. Yet the view was long held, and is still maintained by writers of knowledge and insight, that the Philippa of 1366 was at that date Chaucer's wife. In or before that year he married, it was said, Philippa Roet, daughter of Sir Paon de Roet of Hainault, Guienne King of Arms, who came to England in Queen Philippa's retinue in 1328. This tradition derived special significance from the fact that another daughter of Sir Paon, Katharine, widow of Sir Hugh Swynford, was

successively governess, mistress, and (third) wife to the Duke of Lancaster, to whose service both Geoffrey and Philippa Chaucer were at one time attached. It was apparently founded on the circumstance that Thomas Chaucer, the supposed son of the poet, quartered the Roet arms with his own. But unfortunately there is no evidence to show that Thomas Chaucer was a son of Geoffrey; and the superstructure must needs vanish with its basis. It being then no longer indispensable to assume Chaucer to have been a married man in 1366, the Philippa Chaucer of that year *may* have been only a namesake, and possibly a relative, of Geoffrey; for there were other Chaucers in London besides him and his father (who died this year), and one Chaucer at least has been found who was well-to-do enough to have a Damsel of the Queen's Chamber for his daughter in these certainly not very exclusive times.

There is accordingly no *proof* that Chaucer was a married man before 1374, when he is known to have received a pension for his own and his wife's services. But with this negative result we are asked not to be poor-spirited enough to rest content. At the opening of his *Book of the Duchess*, a poem certainly written towards the end of the year 1369, Chaucer makes use of certain expressions, both very pathetic and very definite. The most obvious interpretation of the lines in question seems to be that they contain the confession of a hopeless passion, which has lasted for eight years—a confession which certainly seems to come more appropriately and more naturally from an unmarried than from a married man. "For eight years," he says, or seems to say, "I have loved, and loved in vain —and yet my cure is never the nearer. There is but one physician that can heal me—but all that is ended and done with. Let us pass on into fresh fields; what cannot

be obtained must needs be left." It seems impossible to interpret this passage (too long to cite *in extenso*) as a complaint of married life. Many other poets have indeed complained of their married lives, and Chaucer (if the view to be advanced below be correct) as emphatically as any. But though such occasional exclamations of impatience or regret—more especially when in a comic vein—may receive pardon, or even provoke amusement, yet a serious and sustained poetic version of Sterne's "*sum multum fatigatus de uxore mea*" would be unbearable in any writer of self-respect, and wholly out of character in Chaucer. Even Byron only indited elegies about his married life after his wife *had left him*.

Now, among Chaucer's minor poems is preserved one called the *Complaint of the Death of Pity*, which purports to set forth "how pity is dead and buried in a gentle heart," and, after testifying to a hopeless passion, ends with the following declaration, addressed to Pity, as in a "bill" or letter:—

> This is to say: I will be yours for ever,
> Though ye me slay by Cruelty, your foe;
> Yet shall my spirit nevermore dissever
> From your service, for any pain or woe,
> Pity, whom I have sought so long ago!
> Thus for your death I may well weep and plain,
> With heart all sore, and full of busy pain.

If this poem be autobiographical, it would indisputably correspond well enough to a period in Chaucer's life, and to a mood of mind preceding those to which the introduction to the *Book of the Duchess* belongs. If it be not autobiographical—and in truth there is nothing to prove it such, so that an attempt has been actually made to suggest its having been intended to apply to the expe-

riences of another man—then the *Complaint of Pity* has no special value for students of Chaucer, since its poetic beauty, as there can be no harm in observing, is not in itself very great.

To come to an end of this topic, there seems no possibility of escaping from one of the following alternatives. *Either* the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 was Geoffrey Chaucer's wife, whether or not she was Philippa Roet before marriage, and the lament of 1369 had reference to another lady—anassumption to be regretted in the case of a married man, but not out of the range of possibility. *Or*—and this seems on the whole the most probable view—the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 was a namesake whom Geoffrey married some time after 1369, possibly, (of course only *possibly*,) the very lady whom he had loved hopelessly for eight years, and persuaded himself that he had at last relinquished—and who had then relented after all. This last conjecture it is certainly difficult to reconcile with the conclusion at which we arrive on other grounds, that Chaucer's married life was not one of preponderating bliss. That he and his wife were *cousins* is a pleasing thought, but one which is not made more pleasing by the seeming fact that, if they were so related, marriage in their case failed to draw close that hearts' bond which such kinship at times half unconsciously knits.

Married or still a bachelor, Chaucer may fairly be supposed, during part of the years previous to that in which we find him securely established in the king's service, to have enjoyed a measure of independence and leisure open to few men in his rank of life, when once the golden days of youth and early manhood have passed away. Such years are in many men's lives marked by the projection, or even by the partial accomplishment, of literary

undertakings on a large scale, and more especially of such as partake of an imitative character. When a juvenile and facile writer's taste is still unsettled, and his own style is as yet unformed, he eagerly tries his hand at the reproduction of the work of others; translates the *Iliad* or *Faust*, or suits himself with unsuspecting promptitude to the production of masques, or pastorals, or life dramas—or whatever may be the prevailing fashion in poetry—after the manner of the favourite literary models of the day. *A priori*, therefore, everything is in favour of the belief hitherto universally entertained, that among Chaucer's earliest poetical productions was the extant English translation of the French *Roman de la Rose*. That he made *some* translation of this poem is a fact resting on his own statement in a passage indisputably written by him (in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*); nor is the value of this statement reduced by the negative circumstance, that in the extraordinary tag (if it may be called by so irreverent a name) to the extant *Canterbury Tales*, the *Romaunt of the Rose* is passed over in silence, or at least not nominally mentioned, among the objectionable works which the poet is there made to retract. And there seems at least no necessity for giving in to the conclusion that Chaucer's translation has been lost, and was not that which has been hitherto accepted as his. For this conclusion is based upon the use of a formal test, which in truth need not be regarded as of itself absolutely decisive in any case, but which in this particular instance need not be held applicable at all. A particular rule against rhyming with one another particular sounds, which in his later poems Chaucer seems invariably to have followed, need not have been observed by him in what was actually, or all but, his earliest. The unfinished state

of the extant translation accords with the supposition that Chaucer broke it off on adopting (possibly after conference with Gower, who likewise observes the rule) a more logical practice as to the point in question. Moreover, no English translation of this poem besides Chaucer's is ever known to have existed.

Whither should the youthful poet, when in search of materials on which to exercise a ready but as yet untrained hand, have so naturally turned as to French poetry, and in its domain whither so eagerly as to its universally acknowledged master-piece? French verse was the delight of the Court, into the service of which he was about this time preparing permanently to enter, and with which he had been more or less connected from his boyhood. In French Chaucer's contemporary Gower composed not only his first longer work, but not less than fifty ballads or sonnets, and in French (as well as in English) Chaucer himself may have possibly in his youth set his own 'prentice hand to the turning of "*ballades, rondels, virelayes.*" The time had not yet arrived, though it was not far distant, when his English verse was to attest his admiration of Machault, whose fame Froissart and Froissart's imitations had brought across from the French Court to the English; and when Gransson, who served King Richard II. as a squire, was extolled by his English adapter as the "flower of them that write in France." But as yet Chaucer's own tastes, his French blood, if he had any in his veins, and the familiarity with the French tongue which he had already had opportunities of acquiring, were more likely to commend to him productions of broader literary merits and a wider popularity. From these points of view, in the days of Chaucer's youth, there was no rival to the *Roman de la Rose*, one of those rare works on which the

literary history of whole generations and centuries may be said to hinge. The Middle Ages, in which from various causes the literary intercommunication between the nations of Europe was in some respects far livelier than it has been in later times, witnessed the appearance of several such works—diverse in kind but similar to one another in the universality of their popularity: the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Ship of Fools*. The favour enjoyed by the *Roman de la Rose*, was in some ways the most extraordinary of all. In France, this work remained the dominant work of poetic literature, and "the source whence every rhymer drew for his needs" down to the period of the classical revival led by Ronsard (when it was edited by Clement Marot, Spenser's early model). In England, it exercised an influence only inferior to that which belonged to it at home upon both the matter and the form of poetry down to the renascence begun by Surrey and Wyatt. This extraordinary literary influence admits of a double explanation. But just as the authorship of the poem was very unequally divided between two personages, wholly divergent in their purposes as writers, so the *popularity* of the poem is probably in the main to be attributed to the second and later of the pair.

To the *trouvère* Guillaume de Lorris (who took his name from a small town in the valley of the Loire) was due the original conception of the *Roman de la Rose*, for which it is needless to suspect any extraneous source. To novelty of subject he added great ingenuity of treatment. Instead of a narrative of warlike adventures he offered to his readers a psychological romance, in which a combination of symbolisations and personified abstractions supplied the characters of the moral conflict represented.

Bestiaries and Lapidaries had familiarised men's minds with the art of finding a symbolical significance in particular animals and stones; and the language of poets was becoming a language of flowers. On the other hand, the personification of abstract qualities was a usage largely affected by the Latin writers of the earlier Middle Ages, and formed a favourite device of the monastic beginnings of the Christian drama. For both these literary fashions, which mildly exercised the ingenuity while deeply gratifying the tastes of mediæval readers, room was easily found by Guillaume de Lorris within a framework in itself both appropriate and graceful. He told (as reproduced by his English translator) how in a dream he seemed to himself to wake up on a May morning. Sauntering forth, he came to a garden surrounded by a wall, on which were depicted many unkindly figures, such as Hate and Villainy, and Avarice and Old Age, and another thing

> That seemèd like a hypocrite,
> And it was clepèd pope holy.

Within, all seemed so delicious that, feeling ready to give an hundred pound for the chance of entering, he smote at a small wicket and was admitted by a courteous maiden named Idleness. On the sward in the garden were dancing its owner, Sir Mirth, and a company of friends; and by the side of Gladness the dreamer saw the God of Love and his attendant, a bachelor named Sweet-looking, who bore two bows, each with five arrows. Of these bows the one was straight and fair, and the other crooked and unsightly, and each of the arrows bore the name of some quality or emotion by which love is advanced or hindered. And as the dreamer was gazing into the spring

of Narcissus (the imagination), he beheld a rose-tree "charged full of roses," and, becoming enamoured of one of them, eagerly advanced to pluck the object of his passion. In the midst of this attempt he was struck by arrow upon arrow, shot "wonder smart" by Love from the strong bow. The arrow called Company completes the victory; the dreaming poet becomes the Lover (*L'Amant*), and swears allegiance to the God of Love, who proceeds to instruct him in his laws; and the real action (if it is to be called such) of the poem begins. This consists in the Lover's desire to possess himself of the Rose-bud, the opposition offered to him by powers both good and evil, and by Reason in particular, and the support which he receives from more or less discursive friends. Clearly, the conduct of such a scheme as this admits of being varied in many ways and protracted to any length; but its first conception is easy and natural, and when it was novel to boot, was neither commonplace nor ill-chosen.

After writing about one-fifth of the 22,000 verses of which the original French poem consists, Guillaume de Lorris, who had executed his part of the task in full sympathy with the spirit of the chivalry of his times, died, and left the work to be continued by another *trouvère*, Jean de Meung (so-called from the town, near Lorris, in which he lived). "Hobbling John" took up the thread of his predecessor's poem in the spirit of a wit and an encyclopædist. Indeed, the latter appellation suits him in both its special and its general sense. Beginning with a long dialogue between Reason and the Lover, he was equally anxious to display his freedom of criticism and his universality of knowledge, both scientific and anecdotical. His vein was pre-eminently satirical and abundantly allu-

sive; and among the chief objects of his satire are the two favourite themes of mediæval satire in general, religious hypocrisy (personified in *Faux-Semblant*, who has been described as one of the ancestors of *Tartuffe*), and the foibles of women. To the gross salt of Jean de Meung, even more than to the courtly perfume of Guillaume de Lorris, may be ascribed the long-lived popularity of the *Roman de la Rose;* and thus a work, of which already the theme and first conception imply a great step forwards from the previous range of mediæval poetry, became a favourite with all classes by reason of the piquancy of its flavour, and the quotable applicability of many of its passages. Out of a chivalrous allegory Jean de Meung had made a popular satire; and though in its completed form it could look for no welcome in many a court or castle,—though Petrarch despised it, and Gerson in the name of the Church recorded a protest against it,—and though a bevy of offended ladies had well-nigh taken the law into their own hands against its author,—yet it commanded a vast public of admirers. And against such a popularity even an offended clergy, though aided by the sneers of the fastidious and the vehemence of the fair, is wont to contend in vain.

Chaucer's translation of this poem is thought to have been the cause which called forth from Eustace Deschamps, Machault's pupil and nephew, the complimentary *ballade* in the refrain of which the Englishman is saluted as

Grant translateur, noble Geffroi Chaucier.

But whether or not such was the case, his version of the *Roman de la Rose* seems, on the whole, to be a translation properly so called—although, considering the great num-

ber of MSS. existing of the French original, it would probably be no easy task to verify the assertion that in one or the other of these are to be found the few passages thought to have been interpolated by Chaucer. On the other hand, his omissions are extensive; indeed, the whole of his translation amounts to little more than one-third of the French original. It is all the more noteworthy that Chaucer reproduces only about one-half of the part contributed by Jean de Meung, and again condenses this half to one-third of its length. In general, he has preserved the French names of localities, and even occasionally helps himself to a rhyme by retaining a French word. Occasionally he shows a certain timidity as a translator, speaking of "the tree which in France men call a pine," and pointing out, so that there may be no mistake, that mermaidens are called "sereyns" (*sirènes*) in France. On the other hand, his natural vivacity now and then suggests to him a turn of phrase or an illustration of his own. As a loyal English courtier he cannot compare a fair bachelor to any one so aptly as to "the lord's son of Windsor;" and as writing not far from the time when the Statute of Kilkenny was passed, he cannot lose the opportunity of inventing an Irish parentage for Wicked-Tongue:

> So full of cursèd rage
> It well agreed with his lineáge;
> For him an Irishwoman bare.

The debt which Chaucer in his later works owed to the *Roman of the Rose* was considerable, and by no means confined to the favourite May-morning exordium and the recurring machinery of a vision—to the origin of which latter (the dream of Scipio related by Cicero and

expounded in the widely-read Commentary of Macrobius) the opening lines of the *Romaunt* point. He owes to the French poem both the germs of felicitous phrases, such as the famous designation of Nature as "the Vicar of the Almighty Lord," and perhaps touches used by him in passages like that in which he afterwards, with further aid from other sources, drew the character of a true gentleman. But the main service which the work of this translation rendered to him was the opportunity which it offered of practising and perfecting a ready and happy choice of words,—a service in which, perhaps, lies the chief use of all translation, considered as an exercise of style. How far he had already advanced in this respect, and how lightly our language was already moulding itself in his hands, may be seen from several passages in the poem; for instance, from that about the middle, where the old and new theme of self-contradictoriness of love is treated in endless variations. In short, Chaucer executed his task with facility, and frequently with grace, though for one reason or another he grew tired of it before he had carried it out with completeness. Yet the translation (and this may have been among the causes why he seems to have wearied of it) has notwithstanding a certain air of schoolwork; and though Chaucer's next poem, to which incontestable evidence assigns the date of the year 1369, is still very far from being wholly original, yet the step is great from the *Romaunt of the Rose* to the *Book of the Duchess*.

Among the passages of the French *Roman de la Rose* omitted in Chaucer's translation are some containing critical reflexions on the character of kings and constituted authorities—a species of observations which kings and constituted authorities have never been notorious for

loving. This circumstance, together with the reference to Windsor quoted above, suggests the probability that Chaucer's connexion with the Court had not been interrupted, or had been renewed, or was on the eve of renewing itself, at the time when he wrote this translation. In becoming a courtier, he was certainly placed within the reach of social opportunities such as in his day he could nowhere else have enjoyed. In England as well as in Italy during the fourteenth and the two following centuries, as the frequent recurrence of the notion attests, the "good" courtier seemed the perfection of the idea of gentleman. At the same time exaggerated conceptions of the courtly breeding of Chaucer's and Froissart's age may very easily be formed; and it is almost amusing to contrast with Chaucer's generally liberal notions of manners, severe views of etiquette like that introduced by him at the close of the *Man of Law's Tale*, where he stigmatizes as a solecism the statement of the author from whom he copied his narrative, that King Ælla sent his little boy to invite the emperor to dinner. "It is best to deem he went himself."

The position which in June, 1367, we find Chaucer holding at Court is that of "Valettus" to the King, or, as a later document of May, 1368, has it, of "Valettus Cameræ Regis"—Valet or Yeoman of the King's Chamber. Posts of this kind, which involved the ordinary functions of personal attendance—the making of beds, the holding of torches, the laying of tables, the going on messages, &c. —were usually bestowed upon young men of good family. In due course of time a royal valet usually rose to the higher post of royal squire—either "of the household" generally, or of a more special kind. Chaucer appears in 1368 as an "esquire of less degree," his name standing

seventeenth in a list of seven-and-thirty. After the year 1373 he is never mentioned by the lower, but several times by Latin equivalents of the higher, title. Frequent entries occur of the pension or salary of twenty marks granted to him for life; and, as will be seen, he soon began to be employed on missions abroad. He had thus become a regular member of the royal establishment, within the sphere of which we must suppose the associations of the next years of his life to have been confined. They belonged to a period of peculiar significance both for the English people and for the Plantagenet dynasty, whose glittering exploits reflected so much transitory glory on the national arms. At home, these years were the brief interval between two of the chief visitations of the Black Death (1361 and 1369), and a few years earlier the poet of the *Vision* had given voice to the sufferings of the poor. It was not, however, the mothers of the people crying for their children whom the courtly singer remembered in his elegy written in the year 1369; the woe to which he gave a poetic expression was that of a princely widower temporarily inconsolable for the loss of his first wife. In 1367 the Black Prince was conquering Castile (to be lost again before the year was out) for that interesting protégé of the Plantagenets and representative of legitimate right, Don Pedro the Cruel, whose daughter the inconsolable widower was to espouse in 1372, and whose "tragic" downfall Chaucer afterwards duly lamented in his *Monk's Tale*:—

> O noble, O worthy Pedro, glory of Spain,
> Whom fortune held so high in majesty!

As yet the star of the valiant Prince of Wales had not been quenched in the sickness which was the harbinger of

death; and his younger brother, John of Gaunt, though already known for his bravery in the field (he commanded the reinforcements sent to Spain in 1367), had scarcely begun to play the prominent part in politics which he was afterwards to fill. But his day was at hand, and the anti-clerical tenour of the legislation and of the administrative changes of these years was in entire harmony with the policy of which he was to constitute himself the representative. 1365 is the year of the Statute of Provisors, and 1371 that of the dismissal of William of Wykeham.

John of Gaunt was born in 1340, and was, therefore, probably of much the same age as Chaucer, and like him now in the prime of life. Nothing could accordingly be more natural than that a more or less intimate relation should have formed itself between them. This relation, there is reason to believe, afterwards ripened on Chaucer's part into one of distinct political partisanship, of which there could as yet (for the reason given above) hardly be a question. There was, however, so far as we know, nothing in Chaucer's tastes and tendencies to render it antecedently unlikely that he should have been ready to follow the fortunes of a prince who entered the political arena as an adversary of clerical predominance. Had Chaucer been a friend of it in principle, he would hardly have devoted his first efforts as a writer to the translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. In so far, therefore, and in truth it is not very far, as John of Gaunt may be afterwards said to have been a Wycliffite, the same description might probably be applied to Chaucer. With such sentiments a personal orthodoxy was fully reconcileable in both patron and follower; and the so-called *Chaucer's A. B. C.*, a version of a prayer to the Virgin in a French poetical

"Pilgrimage," might with equal probability have been put together by him either early or late in the course of his life. There was, however, a tradition, repeated by Speght, that this piece was composed "at the request of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, as a prayer for her private use, being a woman in her religion very devout." If so, it must have been written before the Duchess's death, which occurred in 1369; and we may imagine it, if we please, with its twenty-three initial letters blazoned in red and blue and gold on a flyleaf inserted in the Book of the pious Duchess,—herself, in the fervent language of the poem, an illuminated calendar, as being lighted in this world with the Virgin's holy name.

In the autumn of 1369, then, the Duchess Blanche died an early death; and it is pleasing to know that John of Gaunt, to whom his marriage with her had brought wealth and a dukedom, ordered services, in pious remembrance of her, to be held at her grave. The elaborate elegy which—very possibly at the widowed Duke's request—was composed by Chaucer, leaves no doubt as to the identity of the lady whose loss it deplores:—

> —— goodë faiʒ *White* she hight;
> Thus was my lady namèd right;
> For she was both fair and bright.

But, in accordance with the taste of his age, which shunned such sheer straightforwardness in poetry, the *Book of the Duchess* contains no further transparent reference to the actual circumstances of the wedded life which had come to so premature an end—for John of Caunt had married Blanche of Lancaster in 1359;—and an elaborate framework is constructed round the essential theme of the poem. Already, however, the instinct of

Chaucer's own poetic genius had taught him the value of personal directness; and, artificially as the course of the poem is arranged, it begins in the most artless and effective fashion with an account given by the poet of his own sleeplessness and its cause already referred to—an opening so felicitous that it was afterwards imitated by Froissart. And so, Chaucer continues, as he could not sleep, to drive the night away he sat upright in his bed reading a "romance," which he thought better entertainment than chess or draughts. The book which he read was the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid; and in it he chanced on the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone—the lovers whom, on their premature death, the compassion of Juno changed into the sea-birds that bring good luck to mariners. Of this story (whether Chaucer derived it direct from Ovid, or from Machault's French version is disputed), the earlier part serves as the introduction to the poem. The story breaks off—with the dramatic abruptness in which Chaucer is a master, and which so often distinguishes his versions from their originals—at the death of Alcyone, caused by her grief at the tidings brought by Morpheus of her husband's death. Thus subtly the god of sleep and the death of a loving wife mingle their images in the poet's mind; and with these upon him he falls asleep "right upon his book."

What more natural, after this, than the dream which came to him? It was May, and he lay in his bed at morning-time, having been awakened out of his slumbers by the "small fowls," who were carolling forth their notes—"some high, some low, and all of one accord." The birds singing their matins around the poet, and the sun shining brightly through his windows stained with many a figure of poetic legend, and upon the walls painted in fine colours

"both text and gloss, and all the Rómaunt of the Rose"—is not this a picture of Chaucer by his own hand, on which one may love to dwell? And just as the poem has begun with a touch of nature, and at the beginning of its main action has returned to nature, so through the whole of its course it maintains the same tone. The sleeper awakened —still of course in his dream—hears the sound of the horn, and the noise of huntsmen preparing for the chase. He rises, saddles his horse, and follows to the forest, where the Emperor Octavian (a favourite character of Carolingian legend, and pleasantly revived under this aspect by the modern romanticist, Ludwig Tieck—in Chaucer's poem probably a flattering allegory for the King) is holding his hunt. The deer having been started, the poet is watching the course of the hunt, when he is approached by a dog, which leads him to a solitary spot in a thicket among mighty trees; and here of a sudden he comes upon a man in black, sitting silently by the side of a huge oak. How simple and how charming is the device of the faithful dog acting as a guide into the mournful solitude of the faithful man! For the knight whom the poet finds thus silent and alone, is rehearsing to himself a lay, "a manner song," in these words:—

I have of sorrow so great wone,
That joyë get I never none,
Now that I see my lady bright,
Which I have loved with all my might,
Is from me dead, and is agone.
Alas! Death, what aileth thee
That thou should'st not have taken me,
When that thou took'st my lady sweet?
That was so fair, so fresh, so free,
So goodë, that men may well see
Of all goodnéss she had no meet.

Seeing the knight overcome by his grief, and on the point of fainting, the poet accosts him, and courteously demands his pardon for the intrusion. Thereupon the disconsolate mourner, touched by this token of sympathy, breaks out into the tale of his sorrow which forms the real subject of the poem. It is a lament for the loss of a wife who was hard to gain (the historical basis of this is unknown, but great heiresses are usually hard to gain for cadets even of royal houses), and whom, alas! her husband was to lose so soon after he had gained her. Nothing could be simpler, and nothing could be more delightful than the Black Knight's description of his lost lady as she was at the time when he wooed and almost despaired of winning her. Many of the touches in this description—and among them some of the very happiest—are, it is true, borrowed from the courtly Machault; but nowhere has Chaucer been happier, both in his appropriations and in the way in which he has really converted them into beauties of his own, than in this, perhaps the most lifelike picture of maidenhood in the whole range of our literature. Or is not the following the portrait of an English girl, all life and all innocence—a type not belonging, like its opposite, to any "period" in particular—?

I saw her dance so comelily,
Carol and sing so sweetëly,
And laugh, and play so womanly,
And lookë so debónairly,
So goodly speak and so friendlý,
That, certes, I trow that nevermore
Was seen so blissful a treasúre.
For every hair upon her head,
Sooth to say, it was not red,
Nor yellow neither, nor brown it was,
Methought most likë gold it was.

And ah! what eyes my lady had,
Debónair, goodē, glad and sad,
Simple, of good size, not too wide.
Thereto her look was not aside,
Nor overthwart;

but so well set that, whoever beheld her was drawn and taken up by it, every part of him. Her eyes seemed every now and then as if she were inclined to be merciful, such was the delusion of fools: a delusion in very truth, for

It was no counterfeited thing;
It was her ownē pure looking;
So the goddess, dame Natúre,
Had made them open by measúre
And close; for were she never so glad,
Not foolishly her looks were spread,
Nor wildēly; though that she play'd;
But ever, methought, her eyen said:
"By God, my wrath is all forgiven."

And at the same time she liked to live so happily that dulness was afraid of her; she was neither too "sober" nor too glad; in short, no creature had ever more measure in all things. Such was the lady whom the knight had won for himself, and whose virtues he cannot weary of rehearsing to himself or to a sympathising auditor.

"Sir!" quoth I, "where is she now?"
"Now?" quoth he, and stopped anon;
Therewith he waxed as dead as stone,
And said: "Alas that I was bore!
That was the loss! and heretofore
I told to thee what I had lost.
Bethink thee what I said. Thou know'st
In sooth full little what thou meanest:
I have lost morē than thou weenest.
God wot, alas! right that was she."
"Alas, sir, how? what may that be?"
"She is dead." "Nay?" "Yes, by my truth!"
"Is that your loss? by God, it is ruth."

And with that word, the hunt breaking up, the knight and the poet depart to a "long castle with white walls on a rich hill" (Richmond ?), where a bell tolls and awakens the poet from his slumbers, to let him find himself lying in his bed, and the book with its legend of love and sleep resting in his hand. One hardly knows at whom more to wonder—whether at the distinguished French scholar who sees so many trees that he cannot see a forest, and who, not content with declaring the *Book of the Duchess*, as a whole as well as in its details, a servile imitation of Machault, pronounces it at the same time one of Chaucer's feeblest productions; or at the equally eminent English scholar who, with a flippancy which for once ceases to be amusing, opines that Chaucer ought to "have felt ashamed of himself for this most lame and impotent conclusion" of a poem "full of beauties," and ought to have been "caned for it!" Not only was this "lame and impotent conclusion" imitated by Spenser in his lovely elegy, *Daphnaïda*;[1] but it is the first passage in Chaucer's writings revealing, one would have thought unmistakeably, the dramatic power which was among his most characteristic gifts. The charm of this poem, notwithstanding all the artificialities with which it is overlaid, lies in its simplicity and truth to nature. A real human being is here brought before us instead of a vague abstraction; and the glow of life is on the page, though it has to tell of death and mourning.

[1] I have been anticipated in pointing out this fact by the author of the biographical essay on *Spenser* in this series—an essay to which I cannot help taking this opportunity of offering a tribute of sincere admiration. It may not be an undesigned coincidence that the inconsolable widower of the *Daphnaïda* is named Alcyon, while Chaucer's poem begins with a reference to the myth of Ceyx and Alcyone. Sir Arthur Gorges re-appears as Alcyon in *Colin Clout's come home again*.

Chaucer is finding his strength by dipping into the true spring of poetic inspiration; and in his dreams he is awaking to the real capabilities of his genius. Though he is still uncertain of himself and dependent on others, it seems not too much to say that already in this *Book of the Duchess* he is in some measure an original poet.

How unconscious, at the same time, this waking must have been is manifest from what little is known concerning the course of both his personal and his literary life during the next few years. But there is a tide in the lives of poets, as in those of other men, on the use or neglect of which their future seems largely to depend. For more reasons than one Chaucer may have been rejoiced to be employed on the two missions abroad, which apparently formed his chief occupation during the years 1370-1373. In the first place, the love of books, which he so frequently confesses, must in him have been united to a love of seeing men and cities; few are observers of character without taking pleasure in observing it. Of his literary labours he probably took little thought during these years; although the visit which in the course of them he paid to Italy may be truly said to have constituted the turning-point in his literary life. No work of his can be ascribed to this period with certainty; none of importance has ever been ascribed to it.

On the latter of these missions Chaucer, who left England in the winter of 1372, visited Genoa and Florence. His object at the former city was to negotiate concerning the settlement of a Genoese mercantile factory in one of our ports, for in this century there already existed between Genoa and England a commercial intercourse, which is illustrated by the obvious etymology of the popular term *jane* occur-

ring in Chaucer in the sense of any small coin.[2] It has been supposed that on this journey he met at Padua Petrarch, whose residence was near by at Arqua. The statement of the *Clerk* in the *Canterbury Tales* that he learnt the story of patient Griseldis "at Padua of a worthy clerk . . . . now dead," who was called "Francis Petrarch, the laureate poet," may of course merely imply that Chaucer borrowed the *Clerk's Tale* from Petrarch's Latin version of the original by Boccaccio. But the meeting which the expression suggests may have actually taken place, and may have been accompanied by the most suitable conversation which the imagination can supply; while, on the other hand, it is a conjecture unsupported by any evidence whatever, that a previous meeting between the pair had occurred at Milan in 1368, when Lionel Duke of Clarence was married to his second wife with great pomp in the presence of Petrarch and of Froissart. The really noteworthy point is this: that while neither (as a matter of course) the translated *Romaunt of the Rose*, nor the *Book of the Duchess* exhibits any traces of Italian influence, the same assertion cannot safely be made with regard to any important poem produced by Chaucer after the date of this Italian journey. The literature of Italy which was—and in the first instance through Chaucer himself—to exercise so powerful an influence upon the progress of our own, was at last opened to him, though in what measure, and by what gradations, must remain undecided. Before him lay both the tragedies and the comedies, as he would have called them, of the learned and brilliant Boccaccio—both his epic poems and that inexhaustible treasure-house of stories which Petrarch praised for its pious and grave

[2] "A jane" is in the *Clerk's Tale* said to be a sufficient value at which to estimate the "stormy people."

contents, albeit they were mingled with others of undeniable jocoseness—the immortal *Decamerone*. He could examine the refined gold of Petrarch's own verse with its exquisite variations of its favourite pure theme and its adequate treatment of other elevated subjects; and he might gaze down the long vista of pictured reminiscences, grand and sombre, called up by the mightiest Muse of the Middle Ages, the Muse of Dante. (Chaucer's genius, it may be said at once, was not *transformed* by its contact with Italian literature; for a conscious desire as well as a conscientious effort is needed for bringing about such a transformation; and to compare the results of his first Italian journey with those of Goethe's pilgrimage across the Alps, for instance, would be palpably absurd.) It might even be doubted whether for the themes which he was afterwards likely to choose, and actually did choose, for poetic treatment the materials at his command in French (and English) poetry and prose would not have sufficed him. As it was, it seems probable that he took many things from Italian literature; it is certain that he learnt much from it. There seems every reason to conclude that the influence of Italian study upon Chaucer made him more assiduous as well as more careful in the employment of his poetic powers—more hopeful at once, if one may so say, and more assured of himself.

Meanwhile, soon after his return from his second foreign mission, he was enabled to begin a more settled life at home. He had acquitted himself to the satisfaction of the Crown, as is shown by the grant for life of a daily pitcher of wine, made to him on April 23rd, 1374, the merry day of the Feast of St. George. It would of course be a mistake to conclude, from any seeming analogies of later times, that this grant, which was received by Chaucer

in money-value, and which seems finally to have been commuted for an annual payment of twenty marks, betokened on the part of the King a spirit of patronage appropriate to the claims of literary leisure. How remote such a notion was from the minds of Chaucer's employers is proved by the terms of the patent by which, in the month of June following, he was appointed Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidy of wools, skins, and tanned hides in the port of London. This patent (doubtless according to the usual official form) required him to write the rolls of his office with his own hand, to be continually present there, and to perform his duties in person and not by deputy. By a warrant of the same month Chaucer was granted the pension of 10*l.* for life already mentioned, for services rendered by him and his wife to the Duke and Duchess of Lancaster and to the Queen; by two successive grants of the year 1375 he received further pecuniary gratifications of a more or less temporary nature; and he continued to receive his pension and allowance for robes as one of the royal esquires. We may therefore conceive of him as now established in a comfortable as well as seemingly secure position. His regular work as comptroller (of which a few scattered documentary vestiges are preserved) scarcely offers more points for the imagination to exercise itself upon than Burns's excisemanship or Wordsworth's collectorship of stamps,[1] though doubtless it must have brought him into constant contact with merchants and with shipmen, and may have suggested to him many a broad descriptive touch. On the other hand, it is not necessary to be a poet to feel something of that ineffable *ennui* of official life, which even

[1] It is a curious circumstance that Dryden should have received as a reward for his political services as a satirist, an office almost identical with Chaucer's. But he held it for little more than a year.

the self-compensatory practice of arriving late at one's desk, but departing from it early, can only abate, but not take away. The passage has been often quoted in which Chaucer half implies a feeling of the kind, and tells how he sought recreation from what Charles Lamb would have called his "works" at the Custom House in the reading, as we know he did in the writing, of other books :—

> —— when thy labour done all is,
> And hast y-madë reckonings,
> Instead of rest and newë things
> Thou go'st home to thine house anon,
> And there as dumb as any stone
> Thou sittest at another book.

The house at home was doubtless that in Aldgate, of which the lease to Chaucer, bearing date May, 1374, has been discovered; and to this we may fancy Chaucer walking morning and evening from the riverside, past the Postern Gate by the Tower. Already, however, in 1376, the routine of his occupations appears to have been interrupted by his engagement on some secret service under Sir John Burley; and in the following year, and in 1378, he was repeatedly abroad in the service of the Crown. On one of his journeys in the last-named year he was attached in a subordinate capacity to the embassy sent to negotiate for the marriage with the French King Charles V.'s daughter Mary to the young King Richard II., who had succeeded to his grandfather in 1377,—one of those matrimonial missions which, in the days of both Plantagenets and Tudors, formed so large a part of the functions of European diplomacy, and which not unfrequently, as in this case at least ultimately, came to nothing. A later journey in May of the same year took Chaucer once more to Italy, whither he had been sent with Sir

Edward Berkeley to treat with Bernardo Visconti, joint lord of Milan, and "scourge of Lombardy," and Sir John Hawkwood—the former of whom finds a place in that brief mirror of magistrates, the *Monk's Tale*. It was on this occasion that of the two persons whom, according to custom, Chaucer appointed to appear for him in the Courts during his absence, one was John Gower, whose name as that of the second poet of his age is indissolubly linked with Chaucer's own.

So far, the new reign, which had opened amidst doubts and difficulties for the country, had to the faithful servant of the dynasty brought an increase of royal goodwill. In 1381—after the suppression of the great rebellion of the villeins—King Richard II. had married the princess whose name for a season linked together the history of two countries the destinies of which had before that age, as they have since, lain far asunder. Yet both Bohemia and England, besides the nations which received from the former the impulses communicated to it by the latter, have reason to remember Queen Anne the learned and the good; since to her was probably due in the first instance the intellectual intercourse between her native and her adopted country. There seems every reason to believe that it was the approach of this marriage which Chaucer celebrated in one of the brightest and most jocund marriage-poems ever composed by a laureate's hand; and if this was so, he cannot but have augmented the favour with which he was regarded at Court. When, therefore, by May, 1382, his foreign journeys had come to an end, we do not wonder to find that, without being called upon to relinquish his former office, he was appointed in addition to the Comptrollership of the Petty Customs in the Port of London, of which post he was allowed to

execute the duties by deputy. In November, 1384, he received permission to absent himself from his old comptrollership for a month, and in February, 1385, was allowed to appoint a (permanent) deputy for this office also. During the month of October, 1386, he sat in Parliament at Westminster as one of the Knights of the Shire for Kent, where we may consequently assume him to have possessed landed property. His fortunes, therefore, at this period had clearly risen to their height; and naturally enough his commentators are anxious to assign to these years the sunniest, as well as some of the most elaborate, of his literary productions. It is altogether probable that the amount of leisure now at Chaucer's command enabled him to carry into execution some of the works for which he had gathered materials abroad and at home, and to prepare others. Inasmuch as it contains the passage cited above, referring to Chaucer's official employment, his poem called the *House of Fame* must have been written between 1374 and 1386 (when Chaucer quitted office), and probably is to be dated near the latter year. Inasmuch as both this poem and *Troilus and Cressid* are mentioned in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, they must have been written earlier than it; and the dedication of *Troilus* to Gower and Strode very well agrees with the relations known to have existed about this time between Chaucer and his brother-poet. Very probably all these three works may have been put forth, in more or less rapid succession, during this fortunate season of Chaucer's life.

A fortunate season—for in it the prince who, from whatever cause, was indisputably the patron of Chaucer and his wife, had, notwithstanding his unpopularity among the lower orders, and the deep suspicion fostered by hostile whisperings against him in his royal nephew's breast,

still contrived to hold the first place by the throne. Though serious danger had already existed of a conflict between the King and his uncle, yet John of Gaunt and his Duchess Constance had been graciously dismissed with a royal gift of golden crowns, when in July, 1386 he took his departure for the continent, to busy himself till his return home in November, 1389, with the affairs of Castile, and with claims arising out of his disbursements there. The reasons for Chaucer's attachment to this particular patron are probably not far to seek; on the precise nature of the relation between them it is useless to speculate. Before Wyclif's death in 1384, John of Gaunt had openly dissociated himself from the reformer; and whatever may have been the case in his later years, it was certainly not as a follower of his old patron that at this date Chaucer could have been considered a Wycliffite.

Again, this period of Chaucer's life may be called fortunate, because during it he seems to have enjoyed the only congenial friendships of which any notice remains to us. The poem of *Troilus and Cressid* is, as was just noted, dedicated to "the moral Gower and the philosophical Strode." Ralph Strode was a Dominican of Jedburgh Abbey, a travelled scholar, whose journeys had carried him as far as the Holy Land, and who was celebrated as a poet in both the Latin and the English tongue, and as a theologian and philosopher. In connexion with speculations concerning Chaucer's relations to Wycliffism it is worth noting that Strode, who after his return to England was appointed to superintend several new monasteries, was the author of a series of controversial arguments against Wyclif. The tradition, according to which he taught one of Chaucer's sons, is untrustworthy. Of John Gower's life little more is known than of Chaucer's; he

appears to have been a Suffolk man, holding manors in that county as well as in Essex, but occasionally to have resided in Kent. At the period of which we are speaking, he may be supposed, besides his French productions, to have already published his Latin *Vox Clamantis*—a poem which, beginning with an allegorical narrative of Wat Tyler's rebellion, passes on to a series of reflexions on the causes of the movement, conceived in a spirit of indignation against the corruptions of the Church, but not of sympathy with Wycliffism. This is no doubt the poem which obtained for Gower the epithet "moral" (i. e. sententious) applied to him by Chaucer, and afterwards by Dunbar, Hawes, and Shakspere. Gower's *Vox Clamantis* and other Latin poems (including one "against the astuteness of the Evil One in the matter of Lollardry") are forgotten; but his English *Confessio Amantis* has retained its right to a place of honour in the history of our literature. The most interesting part of this poem, its *Prologue*, has already been cited as of value for our knowledge of the political and social condition of its times. It gives expression to a conservative tone and temper of mind; and like many conservative minds, Gower's had adopted, or affected to adopt, the conviction that the world was coming to an end. The cause of the anticipated catastrophe he found in the division, or absence of concord and love, manifest in the condition of things around. The intensity of strife visible among the conflicting elements of which the world, like the individual human being, is composed, too clearly announced the imminent end of all things. Would that a new Arion might arise to make peace where now is hate; but, alas! the prevailing confusion is such that God alone may set it right. But the poem which follows

cannot be said to sustain the interest excited by this introduction. Its machinery was obviously suggested by that of the *Roman de la Rose*, though, as Warton has happily phrased it, Gower, after a fashion of his own, blends Ovid's *Art of Love* with the Breviary. The poet, wandering about in a forest, while suffering under the smart of Cupid's dart, meets Venus, the Goddess of Love, who urges him, as one upon the point of death, to make his full confession to her clerk or priest, the holy father Genius. This confession hereupon takes place by means of question and answer; both penitent and confessor entering at great length into an examination of the various sins and weaknesses of human nature, and of their remedies, and illustrating their observations by narratives, brief or elaborate, from Holy Writ, sacred legend, ancient history, and romantic story. Thus Gower's book, as he says at its close, stands "between earnest and game," and might be fairly described as a *Romaunt of the Rose*, without either the descriptive grace of Guillaume de Lorris, or the wicked wit of Jean de Meung, but full of learning and matter, and written by an author certainly not devoid of the art of telling stories. The mind of this author was thoroughly didactic in its bent; for the beauty of nature he has no real feeling, and though his poem, like so many of Chaucer's, begins in the month of May, he is (unnecessarily) careful to tell us that his object in going forth was not to "sing with the birds." He could not, like Chaucer, transfuse old things into new, but there is enough in his character as a poet to explain the friendship between the pair, of which we hear at the very time when Gower was probably preparing his *Confessio Amantis* for publication.

They are said afterwards to have become enemies; but

in the absence of any real evidence to that effect we cannot believe Chaucer to have been likely to quarrel with one whom he had certainly both trusted and admired. Nor had literary life in England already advanced to a stage of development of which, as in the Elizabethan and Augustan ages, literary jealousy was an indispensable accompaniment. Chaucer is supposed to have attacked Gower in a passage of the *Canterbury Tales*, where he incidentally declares his dislike (in itself extremely commendable) of a particular kind of sensational stories, instancing the subject of one of the numerous tales in the *Confessio Amantis*. There is, however, no reason whatever for supposing Chaucer to have here intended a reflection on his brother poet, more especially as the *Man of Law*, after uttering the censure, relates, though probably not from Gower, a story on a subject of a different kind likewise treated by him. It is scarcely more suspicious that when Gower, in a second edition of his chief work, dedicated in 1393 to Henry, Earl of Derby (afterwards Henry IV.), judiciously omitted the exordium and altered the close of the first edition, both of which were complimentary to Richard II., he left out, together with its surrounding context, a passage conveying a friendly challenge to Chaucer as a "disciple and poet of the God of Love."

In any case there could have been no political difference between them, for Chaucer was at all times in favour with the House of Lancaster, towards whose future head Gower so early contrived to assume a correct attitude. To him —a man of substance, with landed property in three counties—the rays of immediate court-favour were probably of less importance than to Chaucer; but it is not necessity only which makes courtiers of so many of us:

some are born to the vocation, and Gower strikes one as naturally more prudent and cautious—in short, more of a politic personage—than Chaucer. He survived him eight years—a blind invalid, in whose mind at least we may hope nothing dimmed or blurred the recollection of a friend to whom he owes much of his fame.

In a still nearer relationship,—on which the works of Chaucer that may certainly or probably be assigned to this period throw some light,—it seems impossible to describe him as having been fortunate. Whatever may have been the date and circumstances of his marriage, it seems, at all events in its later years, not to have been a happy one. The allusions to Chaucer's personal experience of married life in both *Troilus and Cressid* and the *House of Fame* are not of a kind to be entirely explicable by that tendency to make a mock of women and of marriage, which has frequently been characteristic of satirists, and which was specially popular in an age cherishing the wit of Jean de Meung, and complacently corroborating its theories from naughty Latin fables, French *fabliaux*, and Italian *novelle*. Both in *Troilus and Cressid* and in the *House of Fame* the poet's tone, when he refers to himself, is generally dolorous; but while both poems contain unmistakeable references to the joylessness of his own married life, in the latter he speaks of himself as "suffering debonairly," —or, as we should say, putting a good face upon—a state "desperate of all bliss." And it is a melancholy though half sarcastic glimpse into his domestic privacy which he incidentally, and it must be allowed rather unnecessarily, gives in the following passage of the same poem:—

> "Awake!" to me he said,
> In voice and tone the very same
> *That useth one whom I could name;*

> And with that voice, sooth to say(n)
> My mind returned to me again;
> For it was goodly said to me;
> So was it never wont to be.

In other words, the kindness of the voice reassured him that it was *not* the same as that which he was wont to hear close to his pillow! Again, the entire tone of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is not that of a happy lover; although it would be pleasant enough, considering that the lady who imposes on the poet the penalty of celebrating *good* women is Alcestis, the type of faithful wifehood, to interpret the poem as not only an *amende honorable* to the female sex in general, but a token of reconciliation to the poet's wife in particular. Even in the joyous *Assembly of Fowls*, a marriage-poem, the same discord already makes itself heard; for it cannot be without meaning that in his dream the poet is told by "African,"—

> —— thou of love hast lost thy taste, I guess,
> As sick men have of sweet and bitterness;

and that he confesses for himself that, though he has read much of love, he knows not of it by experience. While, however, we reluctantly accept the conclusion that Chaucer was unhappy as a husband, we must at the same time decline, because the husband was a poet, and one of the most genial of poets, to cast all the blame upon the wife, and to write her down a shrew. It is unfortunate, no doubt, but it is likewise inevitable, that at so great a distance of time the rights and wrongs of a conjugal disagreement or estrangement cannot with safety be adjusted. Yet again, because we refuse to blame Philippa, we are not obliged to blame Chaucer. At the same time it must not be concealed, that his name occurs in the year 1380 in connexion with a legal process of which the most obvious, though

not the only possible, explanation is that he had been guilty of a grave infidelity towards his wife. Such discoveries as this last we might be excused for wishing unmade.

Considerable uncertainty remains with regard to the dates of the poems belonging to this seemingly, in all respects but one, fortunate period of Chaucer's life. Of one of these works, however, which has had the curious fate to be dated and re-dated by a succession of happy conjectures, the last and happiest of all may be held to have definitively fixed the occasion. This is the charming poem called the *Assembly of Fowls*, or *Parliament of Birds*—a production which seems so English, so fresh from nature's own inspiration, so instinct with the gaiety of Chaucer's own heart, that one is apt to overlook in it the undeniable vestiges of foreign influences, both French and Italian. At its close the poet confesses that he is always reading, and therefore hopes that he may at last read something "so to fare the better." But with all this evidence of study the *Assembly of Fowls* is chiefly interesting as showing how Chaucer had now begun to select as well as to assimilate his loans; how, while he was still moving along well-known tracks, his eyes were joyously glancing to the right and the left; and how the source of most of his imagery at all events he already found in the merry England around him, even as he had chosen for his subject one of real national interest.

Anne of Bohemia, daughter of the great Emperor Charles IV., and sister of King Wenceslas, had been successively betrothed to a Bavarian prince and to a Margrave of Meissen, before—after negotiations which, according to Froissart, lasted a year—her hand was given to the young King Richard II. of England. This sufficiently

plains the general scope of the *Assembly of Fowls*, an egorical poem written on or about St. Valentine's Day, 81—eleven months or nearly a year after which date e marriage took place. On the morning sacred to lovers e poet (in a dream, of course, and this time conducted the arch-dreamer Scipio in person) enters a garden con-ining in it the temple of the god of Love, and filled with habitants mythological and allegorical. Here he sees e noble goddess Nature, seated upon a hill of flowers, and ound her "all the fowls that be," assembled as by time noured custom on St. Valentine's Day, "when every wl comes there to choose her mate." Their huge noise d hubbub is reduced to order by Nature, who assigns each fowl its proper place—the birds of prey highest; en those that eat according to natural inclination—

> —worm or thing of which I tell no tale;

en those that live by seed; and the various members of e several classes are indicated with amusing vivacity and int, from the royal eagle "that with his sharp look rceth the sun," and "other eagles of a lower kind" wnwards. We can only find room for a portion of the npany:—

> The sparrow, Venus' son; the nightingale
> That clepeth forth the freshë leavës new;
> The swallow, murd'rer of the beës small,
> That honey make of flowers fresh of hue;
> The wedded turtle, with his heartë true;
> The peacock, with his angels' feathers bright,
> The pheasant, scorner of the cock by night.
>
> The waker goose, the cuckoo, ever unkind;
> The popinjay, full of delícacy;
> The drake, destroyer of his ownë kind;
> The stork, avenger of adultery;
> The cormorant, hot and full of gluttony;

> The crows and ravens with their voice of care;
> And the throstle old, and the frostý fieldfáre.

Naturalists must be left to explain some of these epithets and designations, not all of which rest on allusions as easily understood as that recalling the goose's exploit on the Capitol; but the vivacity of the whole description speaks for itself. One is reminded of Aristophanes' feathered chorus; but birds are naturally the delight of poets, and were befriended by Dante himself.

Hereupon the action of the poem opens. A female eagle is wooed by three suitors—all eagles; but among them the first, or royal eagle, discourses in the manner most likely to conciliate favour. Before the answer is given, a pause furnishes an opportunity to the other fowls for delighting in the sound of their own voices, Dame Nature proposing that each class of birds shall, through the beak of its representative "agitator," express its opinion on the problem before the assembly. There is much humour in the readiness of the goose to rush in with a ready-made resolution, and in the smart reproof administered by the sparrow-hawk amidst the uproar of "the gentle fowls all." At last Nature silences the tumult, and the lady-eagle delivers her answer, to the effect that she cannot make up her mind for a year to come; but inasmuch as Nature has advised her to choose the royal eagle, his is clearly the most favourable prospect. Whereupon, after certain fowls had sung a roundel, "as was always the usance," the assembly, like some human Parliaments, breaks up with shouting;[4] and the dreamer awakes to resume his reading.

[4] Than all the birdis song with sic a schout
That I annone awoik quhair that I lay.
DUNBAR, *The Thrissill and the Rois.*

Very possibly the *Assembly of Fowls* was at no great interval of time either followed or preceded by two poems of far inferior interest—the *Complaint of Mars* (apparently afterwards amalgamated with that of *Venus*), which is supposed to be sung by a bird on St. Valentine's morning, and the fragment *Of Queen Anelida and false Arcite*. There are, however, reasons which make a less early date probable in the case of the latter production, the history of the origin and purpose of which can hardly be said as yet to be removed out of the region of mere speculation. In any case, neither of these poems can be looked upon as preparations, on Chaucer's part, for the longer work on which he was to expend so much labour; but in a sense this description would apply to the translation which, probably before he wrote *Troilus and Cressid*, certainly before he wrote the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, he made of the famous Latin work of Boëthius, "the just man in prison," on the *Consolation of Philosophy*. This book was, and very justly so, one of the favourite manuals of the Middle Ages, and a treasure-house of religious wisdom to centuries of English writers. "Boice of Consolacioun" is cited in the *Romaunt of the Rose;* and the list of passages imitated by Chaucer from the martyr of Catholic orthodoxy and Roman freedom of speech is exceedingly long. Among them are the ever-recurring diatribe against the fickleness of fortune, and (through the medium of Dante) the reflection on the distinction between gentle birth and a gentle life. Chaucer's translation was not made at second-hand; if not always easy it is conscientious, and interpolated with numerous glosses and explanations thought necessary by the translator. The metre of *The Former Life* he at one time or another turned into verse of his own.

Perhaps the most interesting of the quotations made in Chaucer's poems from Boëthius occurs in his *Troilus and Cressid*, one of the many mediæval versions of an episode engrafted by the lively fancy of an Anglo-Norman *trouvère* upon the deathless, and in its literary variations incomparably luxuriant, growth of the story of Troy. On Benoît de Sainte-Maure's poem Guido de Colonna founded his Latin-prose romance; and this again, after being reproduced in languages and by writers almost innumerable, served Boccaccio as the foundation of his poem *Filostrato* —i. e. the victim of love. All these works, together with Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressid*, with Lydgate's *Troy-Book*, with Henryson's *Testament of Cressid* (and in a sense even with Shakspere's drama on the theme of Chaucer's poem), may be said to belong to the second cycle of modern versions of the tale of Troy divine. Already their earlier predecessors had gone far astray from Homer, of whom they only knew by hearsay, relying for their facts on late Latin epitomes, which freely mutilated and perverted the Homeric narrative in favour of the Trojans—the supposed ancestors of half the nations of Europe. Accordingly, Chaucer, in a well-known passage in his *House of Fame*, regrets, with sublime coolness, how "one said that Homer" wrote "lies,"

> Feigning in his poetries
> And was to Greekës favouráble.
> Therefore held he it but fable.

But the courtly poets of the romantic age of literature went a step further, and added a mediæval colouring all their own. One converts the Sibyl into a nun, and makes her admonish Æneas to tell his beads. Another—it is Chaucer's successor Lydgate—introduces Priam's sons exercising

their bodies in tournaments and their minds in the glorious play of chess, and causes the memory of Hector to be consecrated by the foundation of a chantry of priests who are to pray for the repose of his soul. A third finally condemns the erring Cressid to be stricken with leprosy, and to wander about with cup and clapper, like the unhappy lepers in the great cities of the Middle Ages. Everything, in short, is transfused by the spirit of the adapters' own times; and so far are these writers from any weakly sense of anachronism in describing Troy as if it were a moated and turreted city of the later Middle Ages, that they are only careful now and then to protest their own truthfulness when anything in their narrative seems *unlike* the days in which they write.

But Chaucer, though his poem is, to start with, only an English reproduction of an Italian version of a Latin translation of a French poem, and though in most respects it shares the characteristic features of the body of poetic fiction to which it belongs, is far from being a mere translator. Apart from several remarkable reminiscences introduced by Chaucer from Dante, as well as from the irrepressible *Romaunt of the Rose*, he has changed his original in points which are not mere matters of detail or questions of convenience. In accordance with the essentially dramatic bent of his own genius, some of these changes have reference to the aspect of the characters and the conduct of the plot, as well as to the whole spirit of the conception of the poem. Cressid (who, by the way, is a widow at the outset—whether she had children or not, Chaucer nowhere found stated, and therefore leaves undecided) may at first sight strike the reader as a less consistent character in Chaucer than in Boccaccio. But there is true art in the way in which, in the English poem, our

sympathy is first aroused for the heroine, whom, in the end, we cannot but condemn. In Boccaccio, Cressid is fair and false—one of those fickle creatures with whom Italian literature, and Boccaccio in particular, so largely deal, and whose presentment merely repeats to us the old cynical half-truth as to woman's weakness. The English poet, though he does not pretend that his heroine was "religious" (i.e. a nun to whom earthly love is a sin), endears her to us from the first; so much that "O the pity of it" seems the hardest verdict we can ultimately pass upon her conduct. How, then, is the catastrophe of the action, the falling away of Cressid from her truth to Troilus, poetically explained? By an appeal—pedantically put, perhaps, and as it were dragged in violently by means of a truncated quotation from Boëthius—to the fundamental difficulty concerning the relations between poor human life and the government of the world. This, it must be conceded, is a considerably deeper problem than the nature of woman. Troilus and Cressid, the hero sinned against and the sinning heroine, are the *victims of Fate.* Who shall cast a stone against those who are, but like the rest of us, predestined to their deeds and to their doom; since the co-existence of free-will with predestination does not admit of proof? This solution of the conflict may be morally as well as theologically unsound; it certainly is æsthetically faulty; but it is the reverse of frivolous or commonplace.

Or let us turn from Cressid, "matchless in beauty," and warm with sweet life, but not ignoble even in the season of her weakness, to another personage of the poem. In itself the character of Pandarus is one of the most revolting which imagination can devise; so much so that the name has become proverbial for the most despicable

of human types. With Boccaccio Pandarus is Cressid's cousin and Troilus' youthful friend, and there is no intention of making him more offensive than are half the confidants of amorous heroes. But Chaucer sees his dramatic opportunity; and without painting black in black and creating a monster of vice, he invents a good-natured and loquacious, elderly go-between, full of proverbial philosophy and invaluable experience—a genuine light comedy character for all times. How admirably this Pandarus practises as well as preaches his art; using the hospitable Deiphobus and the queenly Helen as unconscious instruments in his intrigue for bringing the lovers together:—

> She came to dinner in her plain intent;
> But God and Pandar wist what all this meant.

Lastly, considering the extreme length of Chaucer's poem, and the very simple plot of the story which it tells, one cannot fail to admire the skill with which the conduct of its action is managed. In Boccaccio the earlier part of the story is treated with brevity, while the conclusion, after the catastrophe has occurred and the main interest has passed, is long drawn out. Chaucer dwells at great length upon the earlier and pleasing portion of the tale, more especially on the falling in love of Cressid, which is worked out with admirable naturalness. But he comparatively hastens over its pitiable end—the fifth and last book of his poem corresponding to not less than four cantos of the *Filostrato*. In Chaucer's hands, therefore, the story is a real love-story, and the more that we are led to rejoice with the lovers in their bliss, the more our compassion is excited by the lamentable end of so much happiness; and we feel at one with the poet, who, after lingering over the happiness of which he has in the end to narrate the fall, as

it were unwillingly proceeds to accomplish his task, and bids his readers be wroth with the destiny of his heroine rather than with himself. His own heart, he says, bleeds and his pen quakes to write what must be written of the falsehood of Cressid, which was her doom.

Chaucer's nature, however tried, was unmistakeably one gifted with the blessed power of easy self-recovery. Though it was in a melancholy vein that he had begun to write *Troilus and Cressid*, he had found opportunities enough in the course of the poem for giving expression to the fresh vivacity and playful humour which are justly reckoned among his chief characteristics. And thus, towards its close, we are not surprised to find him apparently looking forward to a sustained effort of a kind more congenial to himself. He sends forth his "little book, his little tragedy," with the prayer that, before he dies, God his Maker may send him might to "make some comedy." If the poem called the *House of Fame* followed upon *Troilus and Cressid* (the order of succession may, however, have been the reverse), then, although the poet's own mood had little altered, yet he had resolved upon essaying a direction which he rightly felt to be suitable to his genius.

The *House of Fame* has not been distinctly traced to any one foreign source; but the influence of both Petrarch and Dante, as well as that of classical authors, are clearly to be traced in the poem. And yet this work, Chaucer's most ambitious attempt in poetical allegory, may be described not only as in the main due to an original conception, but as representing the results of the writer's personal experience. All things considered, it is the production of a man of wonderful reading, and shows that Chaucer's was a mind interested in the widest variety of

subjects, which drew no invidious distinctions, such as we moderns are prone to insist upon, between Arts and Science, but (notwithstanding an occasional deprecatory modesty) eagerly sought to familiarise itself with the achievements of both. In a passage concerning the men of letters who had found a place in the *House of Fame*, he displays not only an acquaintance with the names of several ancient classics, but also a keen appreciation, now and then perhaps due to instinct, of their several characteristics. Elsewhere he shows his interest in scientific inquiry by references to such matters as the theory of sound and the Arabic system of numeration; while the Mentor of the poem, the Eagle, openly boasts his powers of clear scientific demonstration, in averring that he can speak "lewdly" (i.e. popularly) "to a lewd man." The poem opens with a very fresh and lively discussion of the question of dreams in general —a semi-scientific subject which much occupied Chaucer, and upon which even Pandarus and the wedded couple of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* expend their philosophy.

Thus, besides giving evidence of considerable information and study, the *House of Fame* shows Chaucer to have been gifted with much natural humour. Among its happy touches are the various rewards bestowed by Fame upon the claimants for her favour, including the ready grant of evil fame to those who desire it (a bad name, to speak colloquially, is to be had for the asking); and the wonderful paucity of those who wish their good works to remain in obscurity and to be their own reward, but then Chaucer was writing in the Middle Ages. And as pointing in a direction which the author of the poem was subsequently to follow out, we may also specially notice the company thronging the House of Rumour: shipmen and

pilgrims, the two most numerous kinds of travellers in Chaucer's age, fresh from seaport and sepulchre, with scrips brimful of unauthenticated intelligence. In short, this poem offers in its details much that is characteristic of its author's genius; while, as a whole, its abrupt termination notwithstanding, it leaves the impression of completeness. The allegory, simple and clear in construction, fulfils the purpose for which it was devised; the conceptions upon which it is based are neither idle, like many of those in Chaucer's previous allegories, nor are they so artificial and far-fetched as to fatigue instead of stimulating the mind. Pope, who reproduced parts of the *House of Fame* in a loose paraphrase, in attempting to improve the construction of Chaucer's work, only mutilated it. As it stands, it is clear and digestible; and how many allegories, one may take leave to ask, in our own allegory-loving literature or in any other, merit the same commendation? For the rest, Pope's own immortal *Dunciad*, though doubtless more immediately suggested by a personal satire of Dryden's, is in one sense a kind of travesty of the *House of Fame*,—a *House of Infamy*.

In the theme of this poem there was undoubtedly something that could hardly fail to humour the half-melancholy mood in which it was manifestly written. Are not, the poet could not but ask himself, all things vanity; "as men say, what may ever last?" Yet the subject brought its consolation likewise. Patient labour, such as this poem attests, is the surest road to that enduring fame, which is "conserved with the shade;" and awaking from his vision, Chaucer takes leave of the reader with a resolution already habitual to him—to read more and more, instead of resting satisfied with the knowledge he has already acquired. And in the last of the longer poems which seem assignable

to this period of his life, he proves that one Latin poet at least—Venus' clerk, whom in the *House of Fame* he beheld standing on a pillar of her own Cyprian metal—had been read as well as celebrated by him.

Of this poem, the fragmentary *Legend of Good Women*, the *Prologue* possesses a peculiar biographical as well as literary interest. In his personal feelings on the subject of love and marriage, Chaucer had, when he wrote this *Prologue*, evidently almost passed even beyond the sarcastic stage. And as a poet he was now clearly conscious of being no longer a beginner, no longer a learner only, but one whom his age knew, and in whom it took a critical interest. The list including most of his undoubted works, which he here recites, shows of itself that those already spoken of in the foregoing pages were by this time known to the world, together with two of the *Canterbury Tales*, which had either been put forth independently, or (as seems much less probable) had formed the first instalment of his great work. A further proof of the relatively late date of this *Prologue* occurs in the contingent offer which it makes of the poem to "the Queen," who can be no other than Richard II.'s young consort Anne. At the very outset we find Chaucer as it were reviewing his own literary position —and doing so in the spirit of an author who knows very well what is said against him, who knows very well what there is in what is said against him, and who yet is full of that true self-consciousness which holds to its course—not recklessly and ruthlessly, not with a contempt for the feelings and judgments of his fellow-creatures, but with a serene trust in the justification ensured to every honest endeavour. The principal theme of his poems had hitherto been the passion of love,

and woman who is the object of the love of man. Had he not, the superfine critics of his day may have asked—steeped as they were in the artificiality and florid extravagance of chivalry in the days of its decline, and habituated to mistranslating earthly passion into the phraseology of religious devotion—had he not debased the passion of love, and defamed its object? Had he not begun by translating the wicked satire of Jean de Meung, "a heresy against the law" of Love, and had he not, by cynically painting in his Cressid a picture of woman's perfidy, encouraged men to be less faithful to women

That be as true as ever was any steel?

In Chaucer's way of meeting this charge, which he emphasises by putting it in the mouth of the God of Love himself, it is, to be sure, difficult to recognise any very deeply penitent spirit. He mildly wards off the reproach, sheltering himself behind his defender, the "lady in green," who afterwards proves to be herself that type of womanly and wifely fidelity unto death, the true and brave Alcestis. And even in the body of the poem one is struck by a certain perfunctoriness, not to say flippancy, in the way in which its moral is reproduced. The wrathful invective against the various classical followers of Lamech, the maker of tents,[5] wears no aspect of deep moral

[5] Lamech, Chaucer tells us in *Queen Annelida and the false Arcite*, was the

first father that began
The love of two, and was in bigamy.

This poem seems designed to illustrate much the same moral as that enforced by the *Legend of Good Women*—a moral which, by-the-bye, is already foreshadowed towards the close of *Troilus and Cressid*, where Chaucer speaks of

women that betrayèd be
Through falsë folk. (God give them sorrow, amen!)

[That

indignation; and it is not precisely the voice of a repentant sinner which concludes the pathetic story of the betrayal of Phillis with the adjuration to ladies in general:—

> Beware ye women of your subtle foe,
> Since yet this day men may example see;
> And as in love trust ye no man but me.

At the same time the poet lends an attentive ear, as genius can always afford to do, to a criticism of his shortcomings, and readily accepts the sentence pronounced by Alcestis that he shall write a legend of *good* women, both maidens and also wives, that were

> true in loving all their lives.

And thus, with the courage of a good or at all events easy conscience, he sets about his task which unfortunately —it is conjectured by reason of domestic calamities, probably including the death of his wife—remained, or at least has come down to us unfinished. We have only nine of the nineteen stories which he appears to have intended to present (though indeed a manuscript of Henry IV.'s reign quotes Chaucer's book of "xxv good women"). It is by no means necessary to suppose that all these nine stories were written continuously; maybe, too, Chaucer, with all his virtuous intentions, grew tired of his rather monotonous scheme, at a time when he was beginning to busy himself with stories meant to be fitted into the

> That with their greatë wit and subtlety
> Betray you; and 'tis this that moveth me
> To speak; and, in effect, you all I pray:
> Beware of men, and hearken what I say.

more liberal framework of the *Canterbury Tales*. All t illustrations of female constancy are of classical origin Chaucer is glad to make known, and most of them taken from Ovid. But though the thread of the Leg poet's narratives is supplied by such established favou as the stories of Cleopatra the Martyr Queen of Eg of Thisbe of Babylon the Martyr, and of Dido to w "Æneas was forsworn," yet he by no means slavi adheres to his authorities, but alters or omits in accord with the design of his book. Thus, for instance, we of Medea's desertion by Jason, but hear nothing of h the murderess of her children; while, on the other h the tragedy of Dido is enhanced by pathetic addi not to be found in Virgil. Modern taste may dislik way in which this poem mixes up the terms and ide Christian martyrology with classical myths, and as 'Legend of the Saints of Cupid" assumes the charact a kind of calendar of women canonised by reason of faithfulness to earthly love. But obviously this method of treatment belonging to an age, not to a s poem or poet. Chaucer's artistic judgment in the sele and arrangement of his themes, the wonderful viv and true pathos with which he turns upon Tarqu Jason as if they had personally offended him, his genuine flow of feeling not only *for* but *with* unhappy heroines, add a new charm to the old fa faces. Proof is thus furnished, if any proof were ne that no story interesting in itself is too old to adm being told again by a poet: in Chaucer's version loses something in polish, but nothing in pathos; an breezy freshness of nature seems to be blowing thr tales which became the delight of a nation's, as they been that of many a man's, youth.

A single passage must suffice to illustrate the style of *Legend of Good Women;* and it shall be the lament Ariadne, the concluding passage of the story which the typical tale of desertion, though not, as it re-ains in Chaucer, of desertion unconsoled. It will be en how far the English poet's vivacity is from being tinguished by the pathos of the situation described by im.

Right in the dawëning awaketh she,
And gropeth in the bed, and found right naught.
"Alas," quoth she, "that ever I was wrought!
I am betrayèd!" and her hair she rent,
And to the strandë barefoot fast she went,
And criedë: "Theseus, mine heartë sweet!
Where be ye, that I may not with you meet?
And mightë thus by beastës been y-slain!"
The hollow rockës answeréd her again.
No man she sawë; and yet shone the moon,
And high upon a rock she wentë soon,
And saw his bargë sailing in the sea.
Cold waxed her heart, and right thus saidë she:
"Meeker than ye I find the beastës wild!"
(Hath he not sin that he her thus beguiled?)
She cried, "O turn again for ruth and sin,
Thy bargë hath not all thy meinie in."
Her kerchief on a polë stickèd she,
Askancë, that he should it well y-see,
And should remember that she was behind,
And turn again, and on the strand her find.
But all for naught; his way he is y-gone,
And down she fell aswoonë on a stone;
And up she rose, and kissed, in all her care,
The steppës of his feet remaining there;
And then unto her bed she speaketh so:
"Thou bed," quoth she, "that hast receivèd two,
Thou shalt answér for two, and not for one;
Where is the greater part away y-gone?
Alas, what shall I wretched wight become?
For though so be no help shall hither come,

Home to my country dare I not for dread,
I can myselfē in this case not rede."
Why should I tell more of her cómplaining?
It is so long it were a heavy thing.
In her Epistle Naso telleth all.
But shortly to the endē tell I shall.
The goddēs have her holpen for pitý,
And in the sign of Taurus men may see
The stonēs of her crown all shining clear.
I will no further speak of this mattér.
But thus these falsē lovers can beguile
Their truē love; the devil quite him his while!

Manifestly, then, in this period of his life—if a chronology which is in a great measure conjectural may be accepted—Chaucer had been a busy worker, and his pen had covered many a page with the results of his rapid productivity. Perhaps, his *Words unto his own Scrivener*, which we may fairly date about this time, were rather too hard on "Adam." Authors *are* often hard on persons who have to read their handiwork professionally; but in the interest of posterity poets may be permitted an execration or two against whosoever changes their words as well as against whosoever moves their bones:—

Adam Scrivener, if ever it thee befall
Boece or *Troilus* to write anew,
Under thy long locks may'st thou have the scall,
If thou my writing copy not more true!
So oft a day I must thy work renew,
It to correct and eke to rub and scrape;
And all is through thy negligence and rape.

How far the manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales* had already progressed is uncertain; the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* mentions the *Love of Palamon and Arcite*—an earlier version of the *Knight's Tale*, if not identical with it—and a *Life of Saint Cecilia* which

is preserved, apparently without alteration, in the *Second Nun's Tale*. Possibly other stories had been already added to these, and the *Prologue* written—but this is more than can be asserted with safety. Who shall say whether, if the stream of prosperity had continued to flow, on which the bark of Chaucer's fortunes had for some years been borne along, he might not have found leisure and impulse sufficient for completing his masterpiece, or at all events for advancing it near to completion? That his powers declined with his years is a conjecture which it would be difficult to support by satisfactory evidence; though it seems natural enough to assume that he wrote the best of his *Canterbury Tales* in his best days. Troubled times we know to have been in store for him. The reverse in his fortunes may perhaps fail to call forth in us the sympathy which we feel for Milton in his old age doing battle against a Philistine reaction, or for Spenser overwhelmed with calamities at the end of a life full of bitter disappointment. But at least we may look upon it with the respectful pity which we entertain for Ben Jonson groaning in the midst of his literary honours under that *dura rerum necessitas*, which is rarely more a matter of indifference to poets than it is to other men.

In 1386, as already noted, Chaucer, while continuing to hold both his offices at the Customs, had taken his seat in Parliament as one of the knights of the shire of Kent. He had attained to this honour during the absence in Spain of his patron the Duke of Lancaster, though probably he had been elected in the interest of that prince. But John of Gaunt's influence was inevitably reduced to nothing during his absence, and no doubt King Richard now hoped to be a free agent. But he very speedily found that the hand of his younger uncle, Thomas Duke of

Gloucester, was heavier upon him than that of the elder. The Parliament of which Chaucer was a member was the assembly which boldly confronted the autocratical tendencies of Richard II., and after overthrowing the Chancellor, Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, forced upon the king a Council controlling the administration of affairs. Concerning the acts of this Council, of which Gloucester was the leading member, little or nothing is known, except that in financial matters it attempted, after the manner of new brooms, to sweep clean. Soon the attention of Gloucester and his following was occupied by subjects more absorbing than a branch of reform fated to be treated fitfully. In this instance the new administration had as usual demanded its victims—and among their number was Chaucer. For it can hardly be a mere coincidence that by the beginning of December in this year, 1386, Chaucer had lost one, and by the middle of the same month the other, of his comptrollerships. At the same time, it would be presumptuously unfair to conclude that misconduct of any kind on his part had been the reason of his removal. The explanation usually given is that he fell as an adherent of John of Gaunt; perhaps a safer way of putting the matter would be to say that John of Gaunt was no longer in England to protect him. Inasmuch as even reforming Governments are occasionally as anxious about men as they are about measures, Chaucer's posts may have been wanted for nominees of the Duke of Gloucester and his Council—such as it is probably no injustice to Masters Adam Yerdely and Henry Gisors (who respectively succeeded Chaucer in his two offices) to suppose them to have been. Moreover, it is just possible that Chaucer was the reverse of a *persona grata* to Gloucester's faction on account of the Comptroller's previous

official connexion with Sir Nicholas Brembre, who, besides being hated in the city, had been accused of seeking to compass the deaths of the Duke and of some of his adherents. In any case, it is noticeable that four months *before* the return to England of the Duke of Lancaster, i.e. in July, 1389, Chaucer was appointed Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster, the Tower, and a large number of other royal manors or tenements, including (from 1390 at all events) St. George's Chapel, Windsor. In this office he was not ill-paid, receiving two shillings a day in money, and very possibly perquisites in addition, besides being allowed to appoint a deputy. Inasmuch as in the summer of the year 1389 King Richard had assumed the reins of government in person, while the ascendancy of Gloucester was drawing to a close, we may conclude the King to have been personally desirous to provide for a faithful and attached servant of his house, for whom he had had reason to feel a personal liking. It would be specially pleasing, were we able to connect with Chaucer's restoration to official employment the high-minded Queen Anne, whose impending betrothal he had probably celebrated in one poem, and whose patronage he had claimed for another.

The Clerkship of the King's Works to which Chaucer was appointed, seems to have been but a temporary office; or at all events he only held it for rather less than two years, during part of which he performed its duties by deputy. Already, however, before his appointment to this post, he had certainly become involved in difficulties. For in May, 1388, we find his pensions, at his own request, assigned to another person (John Scalby)—a statement implying that he had raised money on them which he could only pay by making over the pensions themselves. Very

possibly, too, he had, before his dismissal from his comptrollerships, been subjected to an enquiry which, if it did not touch his honour, at all events gave rise to very natural apprehensions on the part of himself and his friends. There is accordingly much probability in the conjecture which ascribes to this season of peril and pressure the composition of the following justly famous stanzas entitled *Good Counsel of Chaucer*:—

Flee from the press, and dwell with soothfastness;
Suffice thee thy good, though it be small;
For hoard hath hate, and climbing tickleness:
Press hath envý, and wealth is blinded all.
Savour no more than thee behovë shall;
Do well thyself that other folk canst rede;
And truth thee shall deliver, it is no dread.

Painë thee not each crooked to redress
In trust of her[6] that turneth as a ball.
Greatë rest stands in little business.
Beware also to spurn against a nail.
Strive not as doth a pitcher with a wall.
Deemë thyself that deemest others' deed;
And truth thee shall deliver, it is no dread.

That thee is sent receive in buxomness;
The wrestling of this world asketh a fall.
Here is no home, here is but wilderness.
Forth, pilgrimë! forth, beast, out of thy stall!
Look up on high, and thankë God of all.
Waivë thy lust, and let thy ghost thee lead,
And truth shall thee deliver, it is no dread.

Misfortunes, it is said, never come alone; and whatever view may be taken as to the nature of the relations between Chaucer and his wife, her death cannot have left him untouched. From the absence of any record as to the payment of her pension after June, 1387, this event

[6] Fortune.

is presumed to have taken place in the latter half of that year. More than this cannot safely be conjectured; but it remains *possible* that the *Legend of Good Women* and its *Prologue* formed a peace-offering to one whom Chaucer may have loved again after he had lost her, though without thinking of her as of his "late departed saint." Philippa Chaucer had left behind her a son of the name of Lewis; and it is pleasing to find the widower in the year 1391 (the year in which he lost his Clerkship of the Works) attending to the boy's education, and supplying him with the intellectual "bread and milk" suitable for his tender age in the shape of a popular treatise on a subject which has at all times excited the intelligent curiosity of the young. The treatise *On the Astrolabe*, after describing the instrument itself, and showing how to work it, proceeded, or was intended to proceed, to fulfil the purposes of a general astronomical manual; but, like other and more important works of its author, it has come down to us in an uncompleted, or at all events incomplete, condition. What there is of it was, as a matter of course, not original—popular scientific books rarely are. The little treatise, however, possesses a double interest for the student of Chaucer. In the first place it shows explicitly, what several passages imply, that while he was to a certain extent fond of astronomical study (as to his capacity for which he clearly does injustice to himself in the *House of Fame*), his good sense and his piety alike revolted against extravagant astrological speculations. He certainly does not wish to go as far as the honest carpenter in the *Miller's Tale*, who glories in his incredulity of aught besides his *credo*, and who yet is afterwards befooled by the very impostor of whose astrological pursuits he had reprehended the impiety. "Men," he says, "should

know nothing of that which is private to God. Yea, blessed be alway a simple man who knows nothing but only his belief." In his little work *On the Astrolabe* Chaucer speaks with calm reasonableness of superstitions in which his spirit has no faith, and pleads guilty to ignorance of the useless knowledge with which they are surrounded. But the other, and perhaps the chief value, to us of this treatise lies in the fact that of Chaucer in an intimate personal relation it contains the only picture in which it is impossible to suspect any false or exaggerated colouring. For here we have him writing to his "little Lewis" with fatherly satisfaction in the ability displayed by the boy "to learn sciences touching numbers and proportions," and telling how, after making a present to the child of "a sufficient astrolabe as for our own horizon composed after the latitude of Oxford," he has further resolved to explain to him a certain number of conclusions connected with the purposes of the instrument. This he has made up his mind to do in a forcible as well as simple way; for he has shrewdly divined a secret, now and then overlooked by those who condense sciences for babes, that children need to be taught a few things not only clearly but fully—repetition being in more senses than one "the mother of studies:"—

> Now will I pray meekly every discreet person that readeth or heareth this little treatise, to hold my rude inditing excused, and my superfluity of words, for two causes. The first cause is: that curious inditing and hard sentences are full heavy at once for such a child to learn. And the second cause is this: that truly it seems better to me to write unto a child twice a good sentence, than to forget it once.

Unluckily we know nothing further of Lewis—not even whether, as has been surmised, he died before he had

been able to turn to lucrative account his calculating powers, after the fashion of his apocryphal brother Thomas or otherwise.

Though by the latter part of the year 1391 Chaucer had lost his Clerkship of the Works, certain payments (possibly of arrears) seem afterwards to have been made to him in connexion with the office. A very disagreeable incident of his tenure of it had been a double robbery from his person of official money, to the very serious extent of twenty pounds. The perpetrators of the crime were a notorious gang of highwaymen, by whom Chaucer was, in September, 1390, apparently on the same day, beset both at Westminster, and near to "the foul Oak" at Hatcham in Surrey. A few months afterwards he was discharged by writ from repayment of the loss to the Crown. His experiences during the three years following are unknown; but in 1394 (when things were fairly quiet in England) he was granted an annual pension of twenty pounds by the King. This pension, of which several subsequent notices occur, seems at times to have been paid tardily or in small instalments, and also to have been frequently anticipated by Chaucer in the shape of loans of small sums. Further evidence of his straits is to be found in his having, in the year 1398, obtained letters of protection against arrest, making him safe for two years. The grant of a tun of wine in October of the same year is the last favour known to have been extended to Chaucer by King Richard II. Probably no English sovereign has been more diversely estimated, both by his contemporaries and by posterity, than this ill-fated prince, in the records of whose career many passages betokening high spirit strangely contrast with the impotence of its close. It will at least be remembered in his favour that he was a patron of the arts;

and that after Froissart had been present at his christening, he received, when on the threshold of manhood, the homage of Gower, and on the eve of his downfall showed most seasonable kindness to a poet far greater than either of these. It seems scarcely justifiable to assign to any particular point of time the *Ballade sent to King Richard* by Chaucer; but its manifest intention was to apprise the king of the poet's sympathy with his struggle against the opponents of the royal policy, which was a thoroughly autocratical one. Considering the nature of the relations between the pair, nothing could be more unlikely than that Chaucer should have taken upon himself to exhort his sovereign and patron to steadfastness of political conduct. And in truth, though the loyal tone of this address is (as already observed) unmistakeable enough, there is little difficulty in accounting for the mixture of commonplace reflexions and of admonitions to the king, to persist in a spirited domestic policy. He is to

> Dread God, do law, love truth and worthiness,

and wed his people—not himself—"again to steadfastness." However, even a quasi-political poem of this description, whatever element of implied flattery it may contain, offers pleasanter reading than those least attractive of all occasional poems, of which the burden is a cry for money. The *Envoy to Scogan* has been diversely dated, and diversely interpreted. The reference in these lines to a deluge of pestilence, clearly means, not a pestilence produced by heavy rains, but heavy rains which might be expected to produce a pestilence. The primary purpose of the epistle admits of no doubt, though it is only revealed in the postscript. After bantering his friend on account of his faint-heartedness in love—

Because thy lady saw not thy distress,
Therefore thou gavest her up at Michaelmas—

Chaucer ends by entreating him to further his claims upon the royal munificence. Of this friend, Henry Scogan, a tradition repeated by Ben Jonson averred that he was a fine gentleman and Master of Arts of Henry IV.'s time, who was regarded and rewarded for his Court "disguisings" and "writings in ballad-royal." He is therefore appropriately apostrophised by Chaucer as kneeling

—— at the streamës head
Of grace, of all honoúr and worthiness,

and reminded that his friend is at the other end of the current. The weariness of tone, natural under the circumstances, obscures whatever humour the poem possesses.

Very possibly the lines to Scogan were written not before, but immediately after, the accession of Henry IV. In that case they belong to about the same date as the wellknown and very plainspoken *Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse*, addressed by him to the new Sovereign without loss of time, if not indeed, as it would be hardly uncharitable to suppose, prepared beforehand. Even in this *Complaint* (the term was a technical one for an elegiac piece, and was so used by Spenser) there is a certain frank geniality of tone, the natural accompaniment of an easy conscience, which goes some way to redeem the nature of the subject. Still, the theme remains one which only an exceptionally skilful treatment can make sufficiently pathetic or perfectly comic. The lines had the desired effect; for within four days after his accession —*i. e.* on October 3rd, 1399—the "conqueror of Brut's Albion," otherwise King Henry IV., doubled Chaucer's

pension of twenty marks, so that, continuing as he did to enjoy the annuity of twenty pounds granted him by King Richard, he was now once more in comfortable circumstances. The best proof of these lies in the fact that very speedily—on Christmas Eve, 1399—Chaucer, probably in a rather sanguine mood, covenanted for the lease for fifty-three years of a house in the garden of the chapel of St. Mary at Westminster. And here, in comfort and in peace, as there seems every reason to believe, he died before another year, and with it the century, had quite run out—on October 25th, 1400.

Our fancy may readily picture to itself the last days of Geoffrey Chaucer, and the ray of autumn sunshine which gilded his reverend head before it was bowed in death. His old patron's more fortunate son, whose earlier chivalrous days we are apt to overlook in thinking of him as a politic king and the sagacious founder of a dynasty, cannot have been indifferent to the welfare of a subject for whose needs he had provided with so prompt a liberality. In the vicinity of a throne the smiles of royalty are wont to be contagious—and probably many a courtier thought well to seek the company of one who, so far as we know, had never forfeited the goodwill of any patron or the attachment of any friend. We may, too, imagine him visited by associates who loved and honoured the poet as well as the man—by Gower, blind or nearly so, if tradition speak the truth, and who, having "long had sickness upon hand," seems unlike Chaucer to have been ministered to in his old age by a housewife whom he had taken to himself in contradiction of principles preached by both the poets; and by "Bukton," converted, perchance, by means of Chaucer's gift to him of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, to a resolution of

perpetual bachelorhood, but otherwise, as Mr. Carlyle would say, "dim to us." Besides these, if he was still among the living, the philosophical Strode in his Dominican habit, on a visit to London from one of his monasteries; or—more probably—the youthful Lydgate, not yet a Benedictine monk, but pausing, on his return from his travels in divers lands, to sit awhile, as it were, at the feet of the master in whose poetic example he took pride; the courtly Scogan; and Occleve, already learned, who was to cherish the memory of Chaucer's outward features as well as of his fruitful intellect:—all these may in his closing days have gathered around their friend; and perhaps one or the other may have been present to close the watchful eyes for ever.

But there was yet another company with which, in these last years, and perhaps in these last days of his life, Chaucer had intercourse, of which he can rarely have lost sight, and which even in solitude he must have had constantly with him. This company has since been well known to generations and centuries of Englishmen. Its members head that goodly procession of figures which have been familiar to our fathers as livelong friends, which are the same to us, and will be to our children after us—the procession of the nation's favourites among the characters created by our great dramatists and novelists, the eternal types of human nature which nothing can efface from our imagination. Or is there less reality about the *Knight* in his short cassock and old-fashioned armour and the *Wife of Bath* in hat and wimple, than—for instance—about Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman? Can we not hear *Madame Eglantine* lisping her "Stratford-atte-Bowe" French as if she were a personage in a comedy by Congreve or Sheridan? Is not the *Summoner*

with his "fire-red cherubim's face" a worthy companion for Lieutenant Bardolph himself? And have not the humble *Parson* and his Brother the *Ploughman* that irresistible pathos which Dickens could find in the simple and the poor? All these figures, with those of their fellow-pilgrims, are to us living men and women; and in their midst the poet who created them lives, as he has painted himself among the company, not less faithfully than Occleve depicted him from memory after death.

How long Chaucer had been engaged upon the *Canterbury Tales* it is impossible to decide. No process is more hazardous than that of distributing a poet's works among the several periods of his life according to divisions of species—placing his tragedies or serious stories in one season, his comedies or lighter tales in another, and so forth. Chaucer no more admits of such treatment than Shakspere, nor because there happens to be in his case little actual evidence by which to control or contradict it, are we justified in subjecting him to it. All we know is that he left his great work a fragment, and that we have no mention in any of his other poems of more than three of the *Tales*—two, as already noticed, being mentioned in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, written at a time when they had perhaps not yet assumed the form in which they are preserved, while to the third (the *Wife of Bath*) reference is made in the *Envoi to Bukton*, the date of which is quite uncertain. At the same time, the labour which was expended upon the *Canterbury Tales* by their author manifestly obliges us to conclude that their composition occupied several years, with inevitable interruptions; while the gaiety and brightness of many of the stories, and the exuberant humour and exquisite pathos of others, as well as the masterly

effectiveness of the *Prologue*, make it almost certain that these parts of the work were written when Chaucer was not only capable of doing his best, but also in a situation which admitted of his doing it. The supposition is therefore a very probable one, that the main period of their composition may have extended over the last eleven or twelve years of his life, and have begun about the time when he was again placed above want by his appointment to the Clerkship of the Royal Works.

Again, it is virtually certain that the poem of the *Canterbury Tales* was left in an unfinished and partially unconnected condition, and it is altogether uncertain whether Chaucer had finally determined upon maintaining or modifying the scheme originally indicated by him in the *Prologue*. There can accordingly be no necessity for working out a scheme into which everything that he has left belonging to the *Canterbury Tales* may most easily and appropriately fit. Yet the labour is by no means lost of such inquiries as those which have with singular zeal been prosecuted concerning the several problems that have to be solved before such a scheme can be completed. Without a review of the evidence it would however be preposterous to pronounce on the proper answer to be given to the questions: what were the number of tales and that of tellers ultimately designed by Chaucer; what was the order in which he intended the *Tales* actually written by him to stand; and what was the plan of the journey of his pilgrims, as to the localities of its stages and as to the time occupied by it—whether one day for the fifty-six miles from London to Canterbury (which is by no means impossible), or two days (which seems more likely), or four. The route of the pilgrimage must have been one in parts of which it is pleasant even now to

dally, when the sweet spring flowers are in bloom which Mr. Boughton has painted for lovers of the poetry of English landscape.

There are one or two other points which should not be overlooked in considering the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. It has sometimes been assumed as a matter of course that the plan of the work was borrowed from Boccaccio. If this means that Chaucer owed to the *Decamerone* the idea of including a number of stories in the framework of a single narrative, it implies too much. For this notion, a familiar one in the East, had long been known to Western Europe by the numerous versions of the terribly ingenious story of the *Seven Wise Masters* (in the progress of which the unexpected never happens), as well as by similar collections of the same kind. And the special connexion of this device with a company of pilgrims might, as has been well remarked, have been suggested to Chaucer by an English book certainly within his ken, the *Vision concerning Piers Plowman*, where in the "fair field full of folk" are assembled among others "pilgrims and palmers who went forth on their way" to St. James of Compostella and to saints at Rome "*with many wise tales*"—("and had leave to lie all their life after"). But even had Chaucer owed the idea of his plan to Boccaccio, he would not thereby have incurred a heavy debt to the Italian novelist. There is nothing really dramatic in the schemes of the *Decamerone*, or of the numerous imitations which it called forth, from the French *Heptaméron* and the Neapolitan *Pentamerone* down to the German *Phantasus*. It is unnecessary to come nearer to our own times; for the author of the *Earthly Paradise* follows Chaucer in endeavouring at least to give a framework of real action

to his collection of poetic tales. There is no organic connexion between the powerful narrative of the Plague opening Boccaccio's book, and the stories chiefly of love and its adventures which follow; all that Boccaccio did was to preface an interesting series of tales by a more interesting chapter of history, and then to bind the tales themselves together lightly and naturally in days, like rows of pearls in a collar. But while in the *Decamerone* the framework in its relation to the stories is of little or no significance, in the *Canterbury Tales* it forms one of the most valuable organic elements in the whole work. One test of the distinction is this: what reader of the *Decamerone* connects any of the novels composing it with the personality of the particular narrator, or even cares to remember the grouping of the stories as illustrations of fortunate or unfortunate, adventurous or illicit, passion? The charm of Boccaccio's book, apart from the independent merits of the Introduction, lies in the admirable skill and unflagging vivacity with which the "novels" themselves are told. The scheme of the *Canterbury Tales*, on the other hand, possesses some genuinely dramatic elements. If the entire form, at all events in its extant condition, can scarcely be said to have a plot, it at least has an *exposition* unsurpassed by that of any comedy, ancient or modern; it has the possibility of a growth of action and interest; and (which is of far more importance, it has a variety of characters which mutually both relieve and supplement one another. With how sure an instinct, by the way, Chaucer has anticipated that unwritten law of the modern drama according to which low comedy characters always appear in couples! Thus the *Miller* and the *Reeve* are a noble pair running in parallel lines, though in contrary directions; so are the

Cook and the *Manciple*, and again and more especially the *Friar* and the *Summoner*. Thus at least the germ of a comedy exists in the plan of the *Canterbury Tales*. No comedy could be formed out of the mere circumstance of a company of ladies and gentlemen sitting down in a country-house to tell an unlimited number of stories on a succession of topics; but a comedy could be written with the purpose of showing how a wide variety of national types will present themselves, when brought into mutual contact by an occasion peculiarly fitted to call forth their individual rather than their common characteristics.

For not only are we at the opening of the *Canterbury Tales* placed in the very heart and centre of English life; but the poet contrives to find for what may be called his action a background, which seems of itself to suggest the most serious emotions and the most humorous associations. And this without anything grotesque in the collocation, such as is involved in the notion of men telling anecdotes at a funeral, or forgetting a pestilence over love-stories. Chaucer's *dramatis personæ* are a company of pilgrims, whom at first we find assembled in a hostelry in Southwark, and whom we afterwards accompany on their journey to Canterbury. The hostelry is that *Tabard* inn which, though it changed its name, and no doubt much of its actual structure, long remained both in its general appearance, and perhaps in part of its actual self, a genuine relic of mediæval London. There, till within a very few years from the present date, might still be had a draught of that London ale of which Chaucer's *Cook* was so thorough a *connoisseur*; and there within the big courtyard, surrounded by a gallery very probably a copy of its predecessor, was ample room for

—— well nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry folk,

with their horses and travelling gear sufficient for a ride to Canterbury. The goal of this ride has its religious, its national, one might even say its political aspect; but the journey itself has an importance of its own. A journey is generally one of the best of opportunities for bringing out the distinctive points in the characters of travellers; and we are accustomed to say that no two men can long travel in one another's company unless their friendship is equal to the severest of tests. At home men live mostly among colleagues and comrades; on a journey they are placed in continual contrast with men of different pursuits and different habits of life. The shipman away from his ship, the monk away from his cloister, the scholar away from his books, become interesting instead of remaining commonplace, because the contrasts become marked which exist between them. Moreover, men undertake journeys for divers purposes, and a pilgrimage in Chaucer's day united a motley group of chance companions in search of different ends at the same goal. One goes to pray, the other seeks profit, the third distraction, the fourth pleasure. To some the road is everything; to others, its terminus. All this vanity lay in the mere choice of Chaucer's framework; there was accordingly something of genius in the thought itself; and even an inferior workmanship could hardly have left a description of a Canterbury pilgrimage unproductive of a wide variety of dramatic effects.

But Chaucer's workmanship was as admirable as his selection of his framework was felicitous. He has executed only part of his scheme, according to which each pilgrim was to tell two tales both going and coming, and the best narrator, the laureate of this merry company, was

to be rewarded by a supper at the common expense on their return to their starting-place. Thus the design was, not merely to string together a number of poetical tales by an easy thread, but to give a real unity and completeness to the whole poem. All the tales told by all the pilgrims were to be connected together by links; the reader was to take an interest in the movement and progress of the journey to and fro; and the poem was to have a middle as well as a beginning and an end:—the beginning being the inimitable *Prologue* as it now stands; the middle the history of the pilgrims' doings at Canterbury; and the close their return and farewell celebration at the Tabard inn. Though Chaucer carried out only about a fourth part of this plan, yet we can see, as clearly as if the whole poem lay before us in a completed form, that its most salient feature was intended to lie in the variety of its characters.

Each of these characters is distinctly marked out in itself, while at the same time it is designed as the type of a class. This very obvious criticism of course most readily admits of being illustrated by the *Prologue*—a gallery of *genre*-portraits which many master-hands have essayed to reproduce with pen or with pencil. Indeed one lover of Chaucer sought to do so with both—poor gifted Blake, whose descriptive text of his picture of the Canterbury Pilgrims Charles Lamb, with the loving exaggeration in which he was at times fond of indulging, pronounced the finest criticism on Chaucer's poem he had ever read. But it should be likewise noticed that the character of each pilgrim is kept up through the poem, both incidentally in the connecting passages between tale and tale, and in the manner in which the tales themselves are introduced and told. The con-

necting passages are full of dramatic vivacity; in these the *Host*, Master Harry Bailly, acts as a most efficient *choragus*, but the other pilgrims are not silent, and in the *Manciple's* Prologue, the *Cook* enacts a bit of downright farce for the amusement of the company and of stray inhabitants of "Bob-up-and-down." He is, however, homœopathically cured of the effects of his drunkenness, so that the *Host* feels justified in offering up a thanksgiving to Bacchus for his powers of conciliation. The *Man of Law's* Prologue is an argument; the *Wife of Bath's* the ceaseless clatter of an indomitable tongue. The sturdy *Franklin* corrects himself when deviating into circumlocution:—

> Till that the brightë sun had lost his hue,
> For th' hórizon had reft the sun of light,
> (This is as much to say as: it was night).

The *Miller* "tells his churlish tale in his manner," of which manner the less said the better; while in the *Reeve's Tale*, Chaucer even, after the manner of a comic dramatist, gives his Northern undergraduate a vulgar ungrammatical phraseology, probably designedly, since the poet was himself a "Southern man." The *Pardoner* is exuberant in his sample-eloquence; the *Doctor of Physic* is gravely and sententiously moral—

> —— a proper man,
> And like a prelate, by Saint Runyan,

says the *Host*. Most sustained of all, though he tells no tale, is, from the nature of the case, the character of Harry Bailly, the host of the Tabard, himself—who, whatever resemblance he may bear to his actual original, is the ancestor of a long line of descendants, including mine Host of the Garter in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. He is a

thorough worldling, to whom anything smacking of the precisian in morals is as offensive as anything of a Romantic tone in literature; he smells a Lollard without fail, and turns up his nose at an old-fashioned ballad or a string of tragic instances as out of date or tedious. In short, he speaks his mind and that of other more timid people at the same time, and is one of those sinners whom everybody both likes and respects. "I advise," says the *Pardoner*, with polite impudence (when inviting the company to become purchasers of the holy wares which he has for sale), that

> —— our host, he shall begin,
> For he is most envelopèd in sin.

He is thus both an admirable picture in himself, and an admirable foil to those characters which are most unlike him—above all to the *Parson* and the *Clerk of Oxford*, the representatives of religion and learning.

As to the *Tales* themselves, Chaucer beyond a doubt meant their style and tone to be above all things *popular*. This is one of the causes accounting for the favour shown to the work,—a favour attested, so far as earlier times are concerned, by the vast number of manuscripts existing of it. The *Host* is, so to speak, charged with the constant injunction of this cardinal principle of popularity as to both theme and style. "Tell us," he coolly demands of the most learned and sedate of all his fellow-travellers,

> —— some merry thing of ádventures;
> Your termës, your colóurs, and your figúres,
> Keep them in store, till so be ye indite
> High style, as when that men to kingës write;
> Speak ye so plain at this time, we you pray,
> That we may understandë that ye say.

And the *Clerk* follows the spirit of the injunction both

by omitting, as impertinent, a proeme in which his original, Petrarch, gives a great deal of valuable, but not in its connexion interesting, geographical information, and by adding a facetious moral to what he calls the "unrestful matter" of his story. Even the *Squire*, though, after the manner of young men, far more than his elders addicted to the grand style, and accordingly specially praised for his eloquence by the simple *Franklin*, prefers to reduce to its plain meaning the courtly speech of the Knight of the Brazen Steed. In connexion with what was said above, it is observable that each of the *Tales* in subject suits its narrator. Not by chance is the all-but-Quixotic romance of *Palamon and Arcite*, taken by Chaucer from Boccaccio's *Teseide*, related by the *Knight;* not by chance does the *Clerk*, following Petrarch's Latin version of a story related by the same author, tell the even more improbable, but, in the plainness of its moral, infinitely more fructuous tale of patient Griseldis. How well the *Second Nun* is fitted with a legend which carries us back a few centuries into the atmosphere of Hrosvitha's comedies, and suggests with the utmost verisimilitude the nature of a nun's lucubrations on the subject of marriage. It is impossible to go through the whole list of the *Tales;* but all may be truly said to be in keeping with the characters and manners (often equally indifferent) of their tellers—down to that of the *Nun's Priest*, which, brimful of humour as it is, has just the mild naughtiness about it which comes so drolly from a spiritual director in his worldlier hour.

Not a single one of these *Tales* can with any show of reason be ascribed to Chaucer's own invention. French literature—chiefly though not solely that of *fabliaux*—doubtless supplied the larger share of his materials; but

that here also his debts to Italian literature, and to Boccaccio in particular, are considerable, seems hardly to admit of denial. But while Chaucer freely borrowed from foreign models, he had long passed beyond the stage of translating without assimilating. It would be rash to assume that where he altered he invariably improved. His was not the unerring eye which, like Shakspere's in his dramatic transfusions of Plutarch, missed no particle of the gold mingled with the baser metal, but rejected the dross with sovereign certainty. In dealing with Italian originals more especially, he sometimes altered for the worse, and sometimes for the better ; but he was never a mere slavish translator. So in the *Knight's Tale* he may be held in some points to have deviated disadvantageously from his original ; but, on the other hand, in the *Clerk's Tale*, he inserts a passage on the fidelity of women, and another on the instability of the multitude, besides adding a touch of nature irresistibly pathetic in the exclamation of the faithful wife, tried beyond her power of concealing the emotion within her :

> O gracious God ! how gentle and how kind
> Ye seemèd by your speech and your viságe
> The day that makèd was our marriáge.

So also in the *Man of Law's Tale*, which is taken from the French, he increases the vivacity of the narrative by a considerable number of apostrophes in his own favourite manner, besides pleasing the general reader by divers general reflexions of his own inditing. Almost necessarily, the literary form and the self-consistency of his originals lose under such treatment. But his dramatic sense, on which perhaps his commentators have not always sufficiently dwelt, is rarely, if ever, at fault. Two illustrations of this gift in Chaucer must suffice, which shall be chosen in

two quarters where he has worked with materials of the most widely different kind. Many readers must have compared with Dante's original (in canto xxxiii. of the *Inferno*) Chaucer's version in the *Monk's Tale* of the story of Ugolino. Chaucer, while he necessarily omits the ghastly introduction, expands the pathetic picture of the sufferings of the father and his sons in their dungeon, and closes, far more briefly and effectively than Dante, with a touch of the most refined pathos :—

DE HUGILINO COMITE PISÆ.

Of Hugolin of Pisa the languór
There may no tonguë tellë for pitý.
But little out of Pisa stands a tower,
In whichë tower in prison put was he;
And with him be his little children three.
The eldest scarcely five years was of age;
Alas! fortúne! it was great cruelty
Such birds as these to put in such a cage.

Condemned he was to die in that prisón,
For Royer, which that bishop was of Pise,
Had on him made a false suggestión,
Through which the people gan on him arise,
And put him in prisón in such a wise,
As ye have heard, and meat and drink he had
So little that it hardly might suffice,
And therewithal it was full poor and bad.

And on a day befell that in that hour
When that his meat was wont to be y-brought,
The gaoler shut the doorës of that tower.
He heard it well, although he saw it not;
And in his heart anon there fell a thought
That they his death by hunger did devise.
"Alas!" quoth he, "alas! that I was wrought!"
Therewith the tearës fellë from his eyes.

His youngest son, that three years was of age,
Unto him said: "Father, why do ye weep?
When will the gaoler bring us our pottáge?
Is there no morsel bread that ye do keep?
I am so hungry that I cannot sleep.
Now wouldë God that I might sleep for ever!
Then should not hunger in my belly creep.
There is no thing save bread that I would liever."

Thus day by day this child began to cry,
Till in his father's lap adown he lay,
And saidë: "Farewell, father, I must die!"
And kissed his father, and died the samë day.
The woeful father saw that dead he lay,
And his two arms for woe began to bite,
And said: "Fortune, alas and well-away!
For all my woe I blame thy treacherous spite."

His children weened that it for hunger was,
That he his armës gnawed, and not for woe.
And saidë: "Father, do not so, alas!
But rather eat the flesh upon us two.
Our flesh thou gavest us, our flesh thou take us fro,
And eat enough." Right thus they to him cried;
And after that, within a day or two,
They laid them in his lap adown and died.

The father in despair likewise died of hunger; and such was the end of the mighty Earl of Pisa, whose tragedy whosoever desires to hear at greater length may read it as told by the great poet of Italy hight Dante.

The other instance is that of *The Pardoner's Tale*, which would appear to have been based on a *fabliau* now lost, though the substance of it is preserved in an Italian novel, and in one or two other versions. For the purpose of noticing how Chaucer arranges as well as tells a story, the following attempt at a condensed prose rendering of his narrative may be acceptable:—

Once upon a time in Flanders there was a company of young men, who gave themselves up to every kind of dissipation and debauchery—haunting the taverns where dancing and dicing continues day and night, eating and drinking, and serving the devil in his own temple by their outrageous life of luxury. It was horrible to hear their oaths, how they tore to pieces our blessed Lord's body, as if they thought the Jews had not rent Him enough; and each laughed at the sin of the others, and all were alike immersed in gluttony and wantonness.

And so one morning it befel that three of these rioters were sitting over their drink in a tavern, long before the bell had rung for nine o'clock prayers. And as they sat, they heard a bell clinking before a corpse that was being carried to the grave. So one of them bade his servant-lad go and ask what was the name of the dead man; but the boy said that he knew it already, and that it was the name of an old companion of his master's. As he had been sitting drunk on a bench, there had come a privy thief, whom men called Death, and who slew all the people in this country; and he had smitten the drunken man's heart in two with his spear, and had then gone on his way without any more words. This Death had slain a thousand during the present pestilence; and the boy thought it worth warning his master to beware of such an adversary, and to be ready to meet him at any time. "So my mother taught me; I say no more." "Marry," said the keeper of the tavern; "the child tells the truth: this Death has slain all the inhabitants of a great village not far from here; I think that there must be the place where he dwells." Then the rioter swore with some of his big oaths that he at least was not afraid of this Death, and that he would seek him out wherever he dwelt. And at his instance his

two boon-companions joined with him in a vow that before nightfall they would slay the false traitor Death, who was the slayer of so many; and the vow they swore was one of closest fellowship between them—to live and die for one another as if they had been brethren born. And so they went forth in their drunken fury towards the village of which the taverner had spoken, with terrible execrations on their lips that "Death should be dead, if they might catch him."

They had not gone quite half a mile when at a stile between two fields they came upon a poor old man, who meekly greeted them with a "God save you, sirs." But the proudest of the three rioters answered him roughly, asking him why he kept himself all wrapped up except his face, and how so old a fellow as he had managed to keep alive so long? And the old man looked him straight in the face and replied, "Because in no town or village, though I journey as far as the Indies, can I find a man willing to exchange his youth for my age; and therefore I must keep it so long as God wills it so. Death, alas! will not have my life, and so I wander about like a restless fugitive, and early and late I knock on the ground, which is my mother's gate, with my staff, and say, 'Dear mother, let me in! behold how I waste away! Alas! when shall my bones be at rest? Mother, gladly will I give you my chest containing all my worldly gear in return for a shroud to wrap me in.' But she refuses me that grace, and that is why my face is pale and withered. But you, sirs, are uncourteous to speak rudely to an inoffensive old man, when Holy Writ bids you reverence grey hairs. Therefore, never again give offence to an old man, if you wish men to be courteous to you in your age, should you live so long. And so God be with you; I must go whither

I have to go." But the second rioter prevented him, and swore he should not depart so lightly. "Thou spakest just now of that traitor Death, who slays all our friends in this country. As thou art his spy, hear me swear that, unless thou tellest where he is, thou shalt die; for thou art in his plot to slay us young men, thou false thief!" Then the old man told them that if they were so desirous of finding Death, they had but to turn up a winding path to which he pointed, and there they would find him they sought in a grove under an oak-tree, where the old man had just left him; "he will not try to hide himself for all your boasting. And so may God the Redeemer save you and amend you!" And when he had spoken, all the three rioters ran till they came to the tree. But what they found there was a treasure of golden florins—nearly seven bushels of them as they thought. Then they no longer sought after Death, but sat down all three by the shining gold. And the youngest of them spoke first, and declared that Fortune had given this treasure to them, so that they might spend the rest of their lives in mirth and jollity. The question was how to take this money—which clearly belonged to some one else—safely to the house of one of the three companions. It must be done by night; so let them draw lots, and let him on whom the lot fell run to the town to fetch bread and wine, while the other two guarded the treasure carefully till the night came, when they might agree whither to transport it.

The lot fell on the youngest, who forthwith went his way to the town. Then one of those who remained with the treasure said to the other: "Thou knowest well that thou art my sworn brother, and I will tell thee something to thy advantage. Our companion is gone, and here is a great quantity of gold to be divided among us three. But

say, if I could manage so that the gold is divided between us two, should I not do thee a friend's turn?" And when the other failed to understand him, he made him promise secrecy and disclosed his plan. "Two are stronger than one. When he sits down, arise as if thou wouldest sport with him; and while thou art struggling with him as in play, I will rive him through both his sides; and look thou do the same with thy dagger. After which, my dear friend, we will divide all the gold between you and me, and then we may satisfy all our desires and play at dice to our hearts' content."

Meanwhile the youngest rioter, as he went up to the town, revolved in his heart the beauty of the bright new florins, and said unto himself: "If only I could have all this gold to myself alone, there is no man on earth who would live so merrily as I." And at last the Devil put it into his relentless heart to buy poison, in order with it to kill his two companions. And straightway he went on into the town to an apothecary, and besought him to sell him some poison for destroying some rats which infested his house and a polecat which, he said, had made away with his capons. And the apothecary said: "Thou shalt have something of which (so may God save my soul!) no creature in all the world could swallow a single grain without losing his life thereby—and that in less time than thou wouldest take to walk a mile in." So the miscreant shut up this poison in a box, and then he went into the next street and borrowed three large bottles, into two of which he poured his poison, while the third he kept clean to hold drink for himself; for he meant to work hard all the night to carry away the gold. So he filled his three bottles with wine, and then went back to his companions under the tree.

What need to make a long discourse of what followed? As they had plotted their comrade's death, so they slew him, and that at once. And when they had done this, the one who had counselled the deed said, "Now let us sit and drink and make merry, and then we will bury his body." And it happened to him by chance to take one of the bottles which contained the poison; and he drank, and gave drink of it to his fellow; and thus they both speedily died.

The plot of this story is, as observed, not Chaucer's. But how carefully, how artistically the narrative is elaborated, incident by incident, and point by point! How well every effort is prepared, and how well every turn of the story is explained! Nothing is superfluous, but everything is arranged with care, down to the circumstances of the bottles being bought, for safety's sake, in the next street to the apothecary's, and of two out of three bottles being filled with poison, which is at once a proceeding natural in itself, and increases the chances against the two rioters when they are left to choose for themselves. This it is to be a good story-teller. But of a different order is the change introduced by Chaucer into his original, where the old hermit—who, of course, is Death himself—is fleeing from Death. Chaucer's Old Man is *seeking* Death, but seeking him in vain—like the Wandering Jew of the legend. This it is to be a poet.

Of course it is always necessary to be cautious before asserting any apparent addition of Chaucer's to be his own invention. Thus, in the *Merchant's Tale*, the very naughty plot of which is anything but original, it is impossible to say whether such is the case with the humorous competi-

tion of advice between Justinus and Placebo,[1] or with the fantastic machinery in which Pluto and Proserpine anticipate the part played by Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. On the other hand, Chaucer is capable of using goods manifestly borrowed or stolen for a purpose never intended in their original employment. Puck himself must have guided the audacious hand which could turn over the leaves of so respected a Father of the Church as St. Jerome, in order to derive from his treatise *On Perpetual Virginity* materials for the discourse on matrimony delivered, with illustrations essentially her own, by the *Wife of Bath*.

Two only among these *Tales* are in prose—a vehicle of expression, on the whole, strange to the polite literature of the pre-Renascence ages—but not both for the same reason. The first of these *Tales* is told by the poet himself, after a stop has been unceremoniously put upon his recital of the *Ballad of Sir Thopas* by the Host. The ballad itself is a fragment of straightforward burlesque, which shows that in both the manner and the metre [2] of ancient romances, literary criticism could even in Chaucer's days find its opportunities for satire, though it is going rather far to see in *Sir Thopas* a predecessor of *Don Quixote*. The *Tale of Melibœus* is probably an English version of a French translation of Albert of Brescia's famous *Book of Consolation and Counsel*, which comprehends in a slight narrative framework a long discussion between the unfortunate Melibœus, whom the wrongs and sufferings

[1] "Placebo" seems to have been a current term to express the character or the ways of "the too deferential man." "Flatterers be the Devil's chaplains, that sing aye *Placebo*."—*Parson's Tale*.

[2] Dunbar's burlesque ballad of *Sir Thomas Norray* is in the same stanza.

inflicted upon him and his have brought to the verge of despair, and his wise helpmate, Dame Prudence. By means of a long argumentation propped up by quotations (not invariably assigned with conscientious accuracy to their actual source) from "The Book," Seneca, "Tullius," and other authors, she at last persuades him not only to reconcile himself to his enemies, but to forgive them, even as he hopes to be forgiven. And thus the Tale well bears out the truth impressed upon Melibœus by the following ingeniously combined quotation :—

> And there said once a clerk in two verses: What is better than gold? Jasper. And what is better than jasper? Wisdom. And what is better than wisdom? Woman. And what is better than woman? No thing.

Certainly, Chaucer gave proof of consummate tact and taste, as well as of an unaffected personal modesty, in assigning to himself as one of the company of pilgrims, instead of a tale bringing him into competition with the creatures of his own invention, after his mocking ballad has served its turn, nothing more ambitious than a version of a popular discourse—half narrative, half homily—in prose. But a question of far greater difficulty and moment arises with regard to the other prose piece included among the *Canterbury Tales*. Of these the so-called *Parson's Tale* is the last in order of succession. Is it to be looked upon as an integral part of the collection; and, if so, what general and what personal significance should be attached to it?

As it stands, the long tractate or sermon (partly adapted from a popular French religious manual), which bears the name of the *Parson's Tale*, is, if not unfinished, at least internally incomplete. It lacks symmetry, and fails entirely to make good the argument or scheme of divisions with which the sermon begins, as conscien-

tiously as one of Barrow's. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to show that what we have is something different from the "meditation" which Chaucer originally put into his *Parson's* mouth. But, while we may stand in respectful awe of the German daring which, whether the matter in hand be a few pages of Chaucer, a Book of Homer, or a chapter of the Old Testament, is fully prepared to show which parts of each are mutilated, which interpolated, and which transposed, we may safely content ourselves, in the present instance, with considering the preliminary question. *A priori*, is there sufficient reason for supposing any transpositions, interpolations, and mutilations to have been introduced into the *Parson's Tale*? The question is full of interest; for while, on the one hand, the character of the *Parson* in the *Prologue* has been frequently interpreted as evidence of sympathy on Chaucer's part with Wycliffism, on the other hand, the *Parson's Tale*, in its extant form, goes far to disprove the supposition that its author was a Wycliffite.

This, then, seems the appropriate place for briefly reviewing the vexed question—*Was Chaucer a Wycliffite?* Apart from the character of the *Parson* and from the *Parson's Tale*, what is the nature of our evidence on the subject? In the first place, nothing could be clearer than that Chaucer was a very free-spoken critic of the life of the clergy—more especially of the Regular clergy—of his times. In this character he comes before us from his translation of the *Roman de la Rose* to the *Parson's Tale* itself, where he inveighs with significant earnestness against self-indulgence on the part of those who are Religious, or have "entered into Orders, as sub-deacon, or deacon, or priest, or hospitallers." In the *Canterbury Tales*, above all, his attacks upon the Friars run nearly

the whole gamut of satire, stopping short perhaps before the note of high moral indignation. Moreover, as has been seen, his long connexion with John of Gaunt is a well-established fact; and it has thence been concluded that Chaucer fully shared the opinions and tendencies represented by his patron. In the supposition that Chaucer approved of the countenance for a long time shown by John of Gaunt to Wyclif there is nothing improbable; neither, however, is there anything improbable in this other supposition, that, when the Duke of Lancaster openly washed his hands of the heretical tenets to the utterance of which Wyclif had advanced, Chaucer, together with the large majority of Englishmen, held with the politic duke rather than with the still unflinching Reformer. So long as Wyclif's movement consisted only of an opposition to ecclesiastical pretensions on the one hand, and of an attempt to revive religious sentiment on the other, half the country or more was Wycliffite, and Chaucer no doubt with the rest. But it would require positive evidence to justify the belief that from this feeling Chaucer ever passed to sympathy with *Lollardry*, in the vague but sufficiently intelligible sense attaching to that term in the latter part of Richard the Second's reign. Richard II. himself, whose patronage of Chaucer is certain, in the end attempted rigorously to suppress Lollardry; and Henry IV., the politic John of Gaunt's yet more politic son, to whom Chaucer owed the prosperity enjoyed by him in the last year of his life, became a persecutor almost as soon as he became a king.

Though, then, from the whole tone of his mind, Chaucer could not but sympathise with the opponents of ecclesiastical domination—though, as a man of free and critical spirit, and of an inborn ability for penetrating beneath the

surface, he could not but find subjects for endless blame and satire in the members of those Mendicant Orders in whom his chief patron's academical ally had recognised the most formidable obstacles to the spread of pure religion—yet all this would not justify us in regarding him as personally a Wycliffite. Indeed, we might as well at once borrow the phraseology of a recent respectable critic, and set down Dan Chaucer as a Puritan! The policy of his patron tallied with the view which a fresh practical mind such as Chaucer's would naturally be disposed to take of the influence of monks and friars, or at least of those monks and friars whose vices and foibles were specially prominent in his eyes. There are various reasons why men oppose established institutions in the season of their decay; but a fourteenth century satirist of the monks, or even of the clergy at large, was not necessarily a Lollard, any more than a nineteenth century objector to doctors' drugs is necessarily a homœopathist.

But, it is argued by some, Chaucer has not only assailed the false; he has likewise extolled the true. He has painted both sides of the contrast. On the one side are the Monk, the Friar, and the rest of their fellows; on the other is the *Poor Parson of a town*—a portrait, if not of Wyclif himself, at all events of a Wycliffite priest; and in the *Tale* or sermon put in the Parson's mouth are recognisable beneath the accumulations of interested editors some of the characteristic marks of Wycliffism. Who is not acquainted with the exquisite portrait in question?—

> A good man was there of religión,
> And was a poorë Parson of a town.
> But rich he was of holy thought and work.
> He was also a learnèd man, a clerk
> That Christës Gospel truly wouldë preach;
> And his parishioners devoutly teach.

Benign he was, and wondrous diligent,
And in adversity full patiént.
And such he was y-provèd oftë sithes.
Full loth he was to curse men for his tithes;
But rather would he givë, without doubt,
Unto his poor parishioners about
Of his off'ring and eke of his substánce.
He could in little wealth have súffisance.
Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,
Yet failed he not for either rain or thunder
In sickness nor mischance to visit all
The furthest in his parish, great and small,
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staff.
This noble ensample to his sheep he gave,
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;
Out of the Gospel he those wordës caught,
And this figúre he added eke thereto,
That "if gold rustë, what shall iron do?"
For if a priest be foul, on whom we trust,
No wonder is it if a layman rust;
And shame it is, if that a priest take keep,
A foul shepherd to see and a clean sheep;
Well ought a priest ensample for to give
By his cleannéss, how that his sheep should live.
He put not out his benefice on hire,
And left his sheep encumbered in the mire,
And ran to London unto Saintë Paul's,
To seek himself a chantery for souls,
Or maintenance with a brotherhood to hold;
But dwelt at home, and keptë well his fold,
So that the wolf ne'er made it to miscarry;
He was a shepherd and no mercenáry.
And though he holy were, and virtuous,
He was to sinful man not déspitous,
And of his speech nor difficult nor digne,
But in his teaching díscreet and benign.
For to draw folk to heaven by fairnéss,
By good ensample, this was his business:
But were there any person obstinate,
What so he were, of high or low estate,
Him would he sharply snub at once. Than this

A better priest, I trow, there nowhere is.
He waited for no pomp and reverence,
Nor made himself a spicèd conscience;
But Christës lore and His Apostles' twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself.

The most striking features in this portrait are undoubtedly those which are characteristics of the good and humble working clergyman of all times; and some of these, accordingly, Goldsmith could appropriately borrow for his gentle poetic sketch of his parson-brother in "Sweet Auburn." But there are likewise points in the sketch which may be fairly described as specially distinctive of Wyclif's Simple Priests—though, as should be pointed out, these Priests could not themselves be designated parsons of towns. Among the latter features are the specially evangelical source of the *Parson's* learning and teaching; and his outward appearance—the wandering, staff in hand, which was specially noted in an archiepiscopal diatribe against these novel ministers of the people. Yet it seems unnecessary to conclude anything beyond this: that the feature which Chaucer desired above all to mark and insist upon in his *Parson*, was the poverty and humility which in him contrasted with the luxurious self-indulgence of the *Monk*, and the blatant insolence of the *Pardoner*. From this point of view it is obvious why the *Parson* is made brother to the *Ploughman*. For, in drawing the latter, Chaucer cannot have forgotten that other Ploughman whom Langland's poem had identified with Him for whose sake Chaucer's poor workman laboured for his poor neighbours, with the readiness always shown by the best of his class. Nor need this recognition of the dignity of the lowly surprise us in Chaucer, who had both sense of justice and sense of humour enough not to flatter one class at the expense of the rest, and who elsewhere

(in the *Manciple's Tale*) very forcibly puts the truth that what in a great man is called a *coup d'état* is called by a much simpler name in a humbler fellow-sinner.

But though, in the *Parson of a Town*, Chaucer may not have wished to paint a Wycliffite priest—still less a Lollard, under which designation so many varieties of malcontents, in addition to the followers of Wyclif, were popularly included—yet his eyes and ears were open; and he knew well enough what the world and its children are at all times apt to call those who are not ashamed of their religion, as well as those who make too conscious a profession of it. The world called them Lollards at the close of the fourteenth century, and it called them Puritans at the close of the sixteenth, and Methodists at the close of the eighteenth. Doubtless the vintners and the shipmen of Chaucer's day, the patrons and purveyors of the playhouse in Ben Jonson's, the fox-hunting squires and town wits of Cowper's, like their successors after them, were not specially anxious to distinguish nicely between more or less abominable varieties of saintliness. Hence, when Master Harry Bailly's tremendous oaths produce the gentlest of protests from the *Parson*, the jovial *Host* incontinently "smells a Lollard in the wind," and predicts (with a further flow of expletives) that there is a sermon to follow. Whereupon the *Shipman* protests not less characteristically:—

> "Nay, by my father's soul, that shall he not,"
> Saidë the Shipman, "here shall he not preach,
> He shall no gospel here explain or teach.
> We all believe in the great God," quoth he;
> "He wouldë sowë some difficulty,
> Or springë cockle in our cleanë corn." [1]

[1] The nickname Lollards was erroneously derived from *lolia* (tares).

After each of the pilgrims except the *Parson* has told a tale (so that obviously Chaucer designed one of the divisions of his work to close with the *Parson's*), he is again called upon by the *Host*. Hereupon appealing to the undoubtedly evangelical and, it might without straining be said, Wycliffite authority of Timothy, he promises as his contribution a "merry tale in prose," which proves to consist of a moral discourse. In its extant form the *Parson's Tale* contains, by the side of much that might suitably have come from a Wycliffite teacher, much of a directly opposite nature. For not only is the necessity of certain sacramental usages to which Wyclif strongly objected insisted upon, but the spoliation of Church property is unctuously inveighed against as a species of one of the cardinal sins. No enquiry could satisfactorily establish how much of this was taken over or introduced into the *Parson's Tale* by Chaucer himself. But one would fain at least claim for him a passage in perfect harmony with the character drawn of the *Parson* in the *Prologue*—a passage (already cited in part in the opening section of the present essay) where the poet advocates the cause of the poor in words which, simple as they are, deserve to be quoted side by side with that immortal character itself. The concluding lines may therefore be cited here :—

> Think also that of the same seed of which churls spring, of the same seed spring lords; as well may the churl be saved as the lord. Wherefore I counsel thee, do just so with thy churl as thou wouldest thy lord did with thee, if thou wert in his plight. A very sinful man is a churl as towards sin. I counsel thee certainly, thou lord, that thou work in such wise with thy churls that they rather love thee than dread thee. I know well, where there is degree above degree, it is reasonable that men should do their duty where it is due; but of a certainty, extortions, and despite of our underlings, are damnable.

In sum, the *Parson's Tale* cannot, any more than the character of the *Parson* in the *Prologue*, be interpreted as proving Chaucer to have been a Wycliffite. But the one as well as the other proves him to have perceived much of what was noblest in the Wycliffite movement, and much of what was ignoblest in the reception with which it met at the hands of worldlings—before, with the aid of the State, the Church finally succeeded in crushing it, to all appearance, out of existence.

The *Parson's Tale* contains a few vigorous touches, in addition to the fine passage quoted, which make it difficult to deny that Chaucer's hand was concerned in it. The inconsistency between the religious learning ascribed to the *Parson* and a passage in the *Tale*, where the author leaves certain things to be settled by divines, will not be held of much account. The most probable conjecture seems therefore to be that the discourse has come down to us in a mutilated form. This *may* be due to the *Tale* having remained unfinished at the time of Chaucer's death: in which case it would form last words of no unfitting kind. As for the actual last words of the *Canterbury Tales*—the so-called *Prayer of Chaucer*—it would be unbearable to have to accept them as genuine. For in these the poet, while praying for the forgiveness of sins, is made specially to entreat the Divine pardon for his "translations and inditing in worldly vanities," which he "revokes in his retractions." These include, besides the Book of the Leo (doubtless a translation or adaptation from Machault) and many other books which the writer forgets, and "many a song and many a lecherous lay," all the principal poetical works of Chaucer (with the exception of the *Romaunt of the Rose*) discussed in this essay. On the other hand, he offers thanks for having

had the grace given him to compose his translation of Boëthius and other moral and devotional works. There is, to be sure, no actual evidence to decide in either way the question as to the genuineness of this *Prayer*, which is entirely one of internal probability. Those who will may believe that the monks, who were the landlords of Chaucer's house at Westminster, had in one way or the other obtained a controlling influence over his mind. Stranger things than this have happened; but one prefers to believe that the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* remained master of himself to the last. He had written much which a dying man might regret; but it would be sad to have to think that, "because of humility," he bore false witness at the last against an immortal part of himself—his poetic genius.

CHAPTER III.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHAUCER AND OF HIS POETRY.

THUS, then, Chaucer had passed away;—whether in good or in evil odour with the powerful interest with which John of Gaunt's son had entered into his unwritten concordate, after all matters but little now. He is no dim shadow to us, even in his outward presence; for we possess sufficient materials from which to picture to ourselves with good assurance what manner of man he was. Occleve painted from memory, on the margin of one of his own works, a portrait of his "worthy master," over against a passage in which, after praying the Blessed Virgin to intercede for the eternal happiness of one who had written so much in her honour, he proceeds as follows:—

> Although his life be quenched, the résemblance
> Of him hath in me so fresh liveliness,
> That to put other men in rémembrance
> Of his persón I have here his likenéss
> Made, to this end in very soothfastness,
> That they that have of him lost thought and mind
> May by the painting here again him find.

In this portrait, in which the experienced eye of Sir Harris Nicolas sees "incomparably the best portrait of Chaucer yet discovered," he appears as an elderly rather than aged man, clad in dark gown and hood—the latter

of the fashion so familiar to us from this very picture, and from the well known one of Chaucer's last patron, King Henry IV. His attitude in this likeness is that of a quiet talker, with downcast eyes, but sufficiently erect bearing of body. One arm is extended, and seems to be gently pointing some observation which has just issued from the poet's lips. The other holds a rosary, which may be significant of the piety attributed to Chaucer by Occleve, or may be a mere ordinary accompaniment of conversation, as it is in parts of Greece to the present day. The features are mild but expressive, with just a suspicion—certainly no more—of saturnine or sarcastic humour. The lips are full, and the nose is what is called good by the learned in such matters. Several other early portraits of Chaucer exist, all of which are stated to bear much resemblance to one another. Among them is one in an early if not contemporary copy of Occleve's poems, full-length, and superscribed by the hand which wrote the manuscript. In another, which is extremely quaint, he appears on horseback, in commemoration of his ride to Canterbury, and is represented as short of stature, in accordance with the description of himself in the *Canterbury Tales.*

For, as it fortunately happens, he has drawn his likeness for us with his own hand, as he appeared on the occasion to that most free-spoken of observers and most personal of critics, the host of the Tabard, the "cock" and marshal of the company of pilgrims. The fellow-travellers had just been wonderfully sobered (as well they might be) by the piteous tale of the Prioress concerning the little clergy-boy,—how, after the wicked Jews had cut his throat because he ever sang *O Alma Redemptoris,* and had cast him into a pit, he was found there by his mother

loudly giving forth the hymn in honour of the Blessed Virgin which he had loved so well. Master Harry Bailly was, as in duty bound, the first to interrupt by a string of jests the silence which had ensued :—

> And then at first he lookèd upon me,
> And saidë thus: "What man art thou?" quoth he;
> "Thou lookèst as thou wouldèst find a hare,
> For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.
> Approach more near, and lookë merrily!
> Now 'ware you, sirs, and let this man have space.
> He in the waist is shaped as well as I;
> This were a puppet in an arm to embrace
> For any woman, small and fair of face.
> He seemeth elfish by his countenance,
> For unto no wight doth he dalliánce.

From this passage we may gather, not only that Chaucer was, as the *Host* of the Tabard's transparent self-irony implies, small of stature and slender, but that he was accustomed to be twitted on account of the abstracted or absent look which so often tempts children of the world to offer its wearer a penny for his thoughts. For "elfish" means bewitched by the elves, and hence vacant or absent in demeanour.

It is thus, with a few modest but manifestly truthful touches, that Chaucer, after the manner of certain great painters, introduces his own figure into a quiet corner of his crowded canvas. But mere outward likeness is of little moment, and it is a more interesting enquiry whether there are any personal characteristics of another sort, which it is possible with safety to ascribe to him, and which must be, in a greater or less degree, connected with the distinctive qualities of his literary genius. For in truth it is but a sorry makeshift of literary biographers to seek to divide a man who is an author into two separate

beings, in order to avoid the conversely fallacious procedure of accounting for everything which an author has written by something which the *man* has done or been inclined to do. What true poet has sought to hide, or succeeded in hiding, his moral nature from his muse? None in the entire band, from Petrarch to Villon, and least of all the poet whose song, like so much of Chaucer's, seems freshly derived from Nature's own inspiration.

One very pleasing quality in Chaucer must have been his modesty. In the course of his life this may have helped to recommend him to patrons so many and so various, and to make him the useful and trustworthy agent that he evidently became for confidential missions abroad. Physically, as has been seen, he represents himself as prone to the habit of casting his eyes on the ground; and we may feel tolerably sure that to this external manner corresponded a quiet, observant disposition, such as that which may be held to have distinguished the greatest of Chaucer's successors among English poets. To us, of course, this quality of modesty in Chaucer makes itself principally manifest in the opinion which he incidentally shows himself to entertain concerning his own rank and claims as an author. Herein, as in many other points, a contrast is noticeable between him and the great Italian masters, who were so sensitive as to the esteem in which they and their poetry were held. Who could fancy Chaucer crowned with laurel, like Petrarch, or even, like Dante, speaking with proud humility of "the beautiful style that has done honour to him," while acknowledging his obligation for it to a great predecessor? Chaucer again and again disclaims all boasts of perfection, or pretensions to pre-eminence, as a poet. His Canterbury Pilgrims have in his name to

disavow, like Persius, having slept on Mount Parnassus, or possessing "rhetoric" enough to describe a heroine's beauty; and he openly allows that his spirit grows dull as he grows older, and that he finds a difficulty as a translator in matching his rhymes to his French original. He acknowledges as incontestable the superiority of the poets of classical antiquity:—

> —— Little book, no writing thou envý,
> But subject be to all true poësy,
> And kiss the steps, where'er thou seest space
> Of Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, Stace.[1]

But more than this. In the *House of Fame* he expressly disclaims having in his light and imperfect verse sought to pretend to "mastery" in the art poetical; and in a charmingly expressed passage of the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* he describes himself as merely following in the wake of those who have already reaped the harvest of amorous song, and have carried away the corn:—

> And I come after, gleaning here and there,
> And am full glad if I can find an ear
> Of any goodly word that ye have left.

Modesty of this stamp is perfectly compatible with a certain self-consciousness which is hardly ever absent from greatness, and which at all events supplies a stimulus not easily dispensed with except by sustained effort on the part of a poet. The two qualities seem naturally to combine into that self-containedness (very different from self-contentedness) which distinguishes Chaucer, and which helps to give to his writings a manliness of tone, the direct opposite of the irretentive querulousness found in so great a number of poets in all times. He cannot indeed be said to

[1] Statius.

maintain an absolute reserve concerning himself and his affairs in his writings; but as he grows older, he seems to become less and less inclined to take the public into his confidence, or to speak of himself except in a pleasantly light and incidental fashion. And in the same spirit he seems, without ever folding his hands in his lap, or ceasing to be a busy man and an assiduous author, to have grown indifferent to the lack of brilliant success in life, whether as a man of letters or otherwise. So at least one seems justified in interpreting a remarkable passage in the *House of Fame*, the poem in which perhaps Chaucer allows us to see more deeply into his mind than in any other. After surveying the various company of those who had come as suitors for the favours of Fame, he tells us how it seemed to him (in his long December dream) that some one spoke to him in a kindly way,

> And saidë: "Friend, what is thy name?
> Art thou come hither to have fame?"
> "Nay, forsoothë, friend!" quoth I;
> "I came not hither (grand merci!)
> For no such causë, by my head!
> Sufficeth me, as I were dead,
> That no wight have my name in hand.
> I wot myself best how I stand;
> For what I suffer, or what I think,
> I will myselfë all it drink,
> Or at least the greater part
> As far forth as I know my art."

With this modest but manly self-possession we shall not go far wrong in connecting what seems another very distinctly marked feature of Chaucer's inner nature. He seems to have arrived at a clear recognition of the truth with which Goethe humorously comforted Eckermann in the shape of the proverbial saying, "Care has been taken

that the trees shall not grow into the sky." Chaucer's, there is every reason to believe, was a contented faith, as far removed from self-torturing unrest as from childish credulity. Hence his refusal to trouble himself, now that he has arrived at a good age, with original research as to the constellations. (The passage is all the more significant since Chaucer, as has been seen, actually possessed a very respectable knowledge of astronomy.) That winged encyclopædia, the Eagle, has just been regretting the poet's unwillingness to learn the position of the Great and the Little Bear, Castor and Pollux, and the rest, concerning which at present he does not know where they stand. But he replies, "No matter!

> —— It is no need;
> I trust as well (so God me speed!)
> Them that write of this mattér,
> As though I knew their places there.

Moreover, as he says (probably without implying any special allegorical meaning), they seem so bright that it would destroy my eyes to look upon them. Personal inspection, in his opinion, was not necessary for a faith which at some times may, and at others must, take the place of knowledge; for we find him, at the opening of the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, in a passage the tone of which should not be taken to imply less than its words express, writing as follows:—

> A thousand timës I have heard men tell,
> That there is joy in heaven, and pain in hell;
> And I accordë well that it is so.
> But nathëless, yet wot I well alsó,
> That there is none doth in this country dwell
> That either hath in heaven been or hell,
> Or any other way could of it know,
> But that he heard, or found it written so,

For by assay may no man proof receive.
But God forbid that men should not believe
More things than they have ever seen with eye!
Men shall not fancy everything a lie
Unless themselves it see, or else it do;
For, God wot, not the less a thing is true,
Though every wight may not it chance to see.

The central thought of these lines, though it afterwards receives a narrower and more commonplace application, is no other than that which has been so splendidly expressed by Spenser in the couplet:—

Why then should witless man so much misweene
That nothing is but that which he hath seen?

The *negative* result produced in Chaucer's mind by this firm but placid way of regarding matters of faith was a distrust of astrology, alchemy, and all the superstitions which in the *Parson's Tale* are noticed as condemned by the Church. This distrust on Chaucer's part requires no further illustration after what has been said elsewhere; it would have been well for his age if all its children had been as clear-sighted in these matters as he, to whom the practices connected with these delusive sciences seemed, and justly so from his point of view, not less impious than futile. His *Canon Yeoman's Tale*, a story of imposture so vividly dramatic in its catastrophe as to have suggested to Ben Jonson one of the most effective passages in his comedy *The Alchemist*, concludes with a moral of unmistakeable solemnity against the sinfulness, as well as uselessness, of "multiplying" (making gold by the arts of alchemy):—

—— Whoso maketh God his adversáry,
As for to work anything in contràry
Unto His will, certes ne'er shall he thrive,
Though that he multiply through all his life.

But equally unmistakeable is the *positive* side of this frame of mind in such a passage as the following—which is one of those belonging to Chaucer himself, and not taken from his French original—in *The Man of Law's Tale*. The narrator is speaking of the voyage of Constance, after her escape from the massacre in which, at a feast, all her fellow-Christians had been killed, and of how she was borne by the "wild wave" from "Surrey" (Syria) to the Northumbrian shore :—

> Here men might askë, why she was not slain?
> Eke at the feast who might her body save?
> And I answérë that demand again:
> Who savèd Daniel in th' horrible cave,
> When every wight save him, master or knave,
> The lion ate—before he could depart?
> No wight but God, whom he bare in his heart.

"In her," he continues, "God desired to show His miraculous power, so that we should see His mighty works. For Christ, in whom we have a remedy for every ill, often by means of His own does things for ends of His own, which are obscure to the wit of man, incapable by reason of our ignorance of understanding His wise providence. But since Constance was not slain at the feast, it might be asked: who kept her from drowning in the sea? Who, then, kept Jonas in the belly of the whale, till he was spouted up at Ninive? Well do we know it was no one but He who kept the Hebrew people from drowning in the waters, and made them to pass through the sea with dry feet. Who bade the four spirits of the tempest, which have the power to trouble land and sea, north and south, and west and east, vex neither sea nor land nor the trees that grow on it? Truly these things were ordered by Him who kept this woman safe from the tempest, as well

when she awoke as when she slept. But whence might this woman have meat and drink, and how could her sustenance last out to her for three years and more? Who, then, fed Saint Mary the Egyptian in the cavern or in the desert? Assuredly no one but Christ. It was a great miracle to feed five thousand folk with five loaves and two fishes; but God in their great need sent to them abundance."

As to the sentiments and opinions of Chaucer, then, on matters such as these, we can entertain no reasonable doubt. But we are altogether too ill acquainted with the details of his personal life, and with the motives which contributed to determine its course, to be able to arrive at any valid conclusions as to the way in which his principles affected his conduct. Enough has been already said concerning the attitude seemingly observed by him towards the great public questions, and the great historical events, of his day. If he had strong political opinions of his own, or strong personal views on questions either of ecclesiastical policy or of religious doctrine—in which assumptions there seems nothing probable—he at all events did not wear his heart on his sleeve, or use his poetry, allegorical or otherwise, as a vehicle of his wishes, hopes, or fears on these heads. The true breath of freedom could hardly be expected to blow through the precincts of a Plantagenet court. If Chaucer could write the pretty lines in the *Manciple's Tale* about the caged bird and its uncontrollable desire for liberty, his contemporary Barbour could apostrophise Freedom itself as a noble thing, in words the simple manliness of which stirs the blood after a very different fashion. Concerning his domestic relations, we may regard it as virtually certain that he was unhappy as a husband, though tender and affectionate as a father.

Considering how vast a proportion of the satire of all times—but more especially that of the Middle Ages, and in these again pre-eminently of the period of European literature which took its tone from Jean de Meung—is directed against woman and against married life, it would be difficult to decide how much of the irony, sarcasm, and fun lavished by Chaucer on these themes is due to a fashion with which he readily fell in, and how much to the impulse of personal feeling. A perfect anthology, or perhaps one should rather say a complete herbarium, might be collected from his works of samples of these attacks on women. He has manifestly made a careful study of their ways, with which he now and then betrays that curiously intimate acquaintance to which we are accustomed in a Richardson or a Balzac. How accurate are such incidental remarks as this, that women are "full measurable" in such matters as sleep —not caring for so much of it at a time as men do! How wonderfully natural is the description of Cressid's bevy of lady-visitors, attracted by the news that she is shortly to be surrendered to the Greeks, and of the "nice vanity"—*i. e.* foolish emptiness—of their consolatory gossip. "As men see in town, and all about, that women are accustomed to visit their friends," so a swarm of ladies came to Cressid, "and sat themselves down, and said as I shall tell. 'I am delighted,' says one, 'that you will so soon see your father.' 'Indeed I am not so delighted,' says another, 'for we have not seen half enough of her since she has been at Troy.' 'I do hope,' quoth the third, 'that she will bring us back peace with her; in which case may Almighty God guide her on her departure.' And Cressid heard these words and womanish things as if she were far away; for she was burning all the time with another passion than any of which they knew; so that she almost felt her heart die

for woe, and for weariness of that company." But his satire against women is rarely so innocent as this; and though several ladies take part in the Canterbury Pilgrimage, yet pilgrim after pilgrim has his saw or jest against their sex. The courteous *Knight* cannot refrain from the generalisation that women all follow the favour of fortune. The *Summoner*, who is of a less scrupulous sort, introduces a diatribe against women's passionate love of vengeance; and the *Shipman* seasons a story which requires no such addition by an enumeration of their favourite foibles. But the climax is reached in the confessions of the *Wife of Bath*, who quite unhesitatingly says that women are best won by flattery and busy attentions; that when won they desire to have the sovereignty over their husbands, and that they tell untruths and swear to them with twice the boldness of men;—while as to the power of their tongue, she quotes the second-hand authority of her fifth husband for the saying that it is better to dwell with a lion or a foul dragon, than with a woman accustomed to chide. It is true that this same *Wife of Bath* also observes with an effective *tu quoque*:—

> By God, if women had but written stories,
> As clerkës have within their oratòries,
> They would have writ of men more wickednéss
> Than all the race of Adam may redress;

and the *Legend of Good Women* seems, in point of fact, to have been intended to offer some such kind of amends as is here declared to be called for. But the balance still remains heavy against the poet's sentiments of gallantry and respect for women. It should at the same time be remembered that among the *Canterbury Tales* the two which are of their kind the most effective, constitute tributes to the most distinctively feminine and wifely

virtue of fidelity. Moreover, when coming from such personages as the pilgrims who narrate the *Tales* in question, the praise of women has special significance and value. The *Merchant* and the *Shipman* may indulge in facetious or coarse jibes against wives and their behaviour, but the *Man of Law*, full of grave experience of the world, is a witness above suspicion to the womanly virtue of which his narrative celebrates so illustrious an example, while the *Clerk of Oxford* has in his cloistered solitude, where all womanly blandishments are unknown, come to the conclusion that

> Men speak of Job, most for his humbleness,
> As clerkës, when they list, can well indite,
> Of men in special; but, in truthfulness,
> Though praise by clerks of women be but slight,
> No man in humbleness can him acquit
> As women can, nor can be half so true
> As women are, unless all things be new.

As to marriage, Chaucer may be said generally to treat it in that style of laughing with a wry mouth, which has from time immemorial been affected both in comic writing and on the comic stage, but which, in the end, even the most determined old bachelor feels an occasional inclination to consider monotonous.

In all this, however, it is obvious that something at least must be set down to conventionality. Yet the best part of Chaucer's nature, it is hardly necessary to say, was neither conventional nor commonplace. He was not, we may rest assured, one of that numerous class which in his days, as it does in ours, composed the population of the land of Philistia—the persons so well defined by the Scottish poet, Sir David Lyndsay (himself a courtier of the noblest type) :—

Who fixèd have their hearts and whole intents
On sensual lust, on dignity, and rents.

Doubtless Chaucer was a man of practical good sense, desirous of suitable employment and of a sufficient income; nor can we suppose him to have been one of those who look upon social life and its enjoyments with a jaundiced eye, or who, absorbed in things which are not of this world, avert their gaze from it altogether. But it is hardly possible that rank and position should have been valued on their own account by one who so repeatedly recurs to his ideal of the true gentleman, as to a conception dissociated from mere outward circumstances, and more particularly independent of birth or inherited wealth. At times, we know, men find what they seek; and so Chaucer found in Boëthius and in Guillaume de Lorris that conception which he both translates and reproduces, besides repeating it in a little *Ballade*, probably written by him in the last *decennium* of his life. By far the best-known and the finest of these passages is that in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, which follows the round assertion that the "arrogance" against which it protests is not worth a hen; and which is followed by an appeal to a parallel passage in Dante:—

Look, who that is most virtuous alway
Privy and open, and most intendeth aye
To do the gentle deedës that he can,
Take him for the greatest gentleman.
Christ wills we claim of Him our gentleness,
Not of our elders for their old richés.
For though they give us all their heritáge
Through which we claim to be of high paráge,
Yet may they not bequeathë for no thing—
To none of us—their virtuous livíng,
That made them gentlemen y-callèd be,
And bade us follow them in such degree.

Well can the wisë poet of Florénce,
That Dante hightë, speak of this senténce;
Lo, in such manner of rhyme is Dante's tale:
"Seldom upriseth by its branches small
Prowess of man; for God of His prowéss
Wills that we claim of Him our gentleness;
For of our ancestors we no thing claim
But temporal thing, that men may hurt and maim."[1]

By the still ignobler greed of money for its own sake there is no reason whatever to suppose Chaucer to have been at any time actuated; although, under the pressure of immediate want, he devoted a *Complaint* to his empty purse, and made known, in the proper quarters, his desire to see it refilled. Finally, as to what is commonly called pleasure, he may have shared the fashions and even the vices of his age; but we know hardly anything on the subject, except that excess in wine, which is often held a pardonable peccadillo in a poet, receives his emphatic condemnation. It would be hazardous to assert of him, as Herrick asserted of himself, that though his "Muse was jocund, his life was chaste;" inasmuch as his name occurs in one unfortunate connexion full of suspiciousness. But we may at least believe him to have spoken his own sentiments in the Doctor of Physic's manly declaration that

—— of all treason sovereign pestilence
Is when a man betrayeth innocence.

[1] The passage in Canto viii. of the *Purgatorio* is thus translated by Longfellow:

"Not oftentimes upriseth through the branches
The probity of man; and this He wills
Who gives it, so that we may ask of Him."

Its intention is only to show that the son is not necessarily what the father is before him; thus, Edward I. of England is a mightier man than was his father Henry III. Chaucer has ingeniously, though not altogether legitimately, pressed the passage into his service.

His true pleasures lay far away from those of vanity and dissipation. In the first place, he seems to have been a passionate reader. To his love of books he is constantly referring; indeed, this may be said to be the only kind of egotism which he seems to take a pleasure in indulging. At the opening of his earliest extant poem of consequence, the *Book of the Duchess*, he tells us how he preferred to drive away a night rendered sleepless through melancholy thoughts, by means of a book, which he thought better entertainment than a game either at chess or at "tables." This passion lasted longer with him than the other passion which it had helped to allay; for in the sequel to the well-known passage in the *House of Fame*, already cited, he gives us a glimpse of himself at home, absorbed in his favourite pursuit:—

> Thou go'st home to thy house anon,
> And there, as dumb as any stone,
> Thou sittest at another book,
> Till fully dasèd is thy look;
> And liv'st thus as a hermit quite,
> Although thy abstinence is slight.

And doubtless he counted the days lost in which he was prevented from following the rule of life which elsewhere he sets himself, "to study and to read alway, day by day," and pressed even the nights into his service when he was not making his head ache with writing. How eager and, considering the times in which he lived, how diverse a reader he was, has already been abundantly illustrated in the course of this volume. His knowledge of Holy Writ was considerable, though it probably for the most part came to him at second-hand. He seems to have had some acquaintance with patristic and homiletic literature; he produced a version of the homily on Mary Magdalene,

improperly attributed to Origen; and, as we have seen, emulated King Alfred in translating Boëthius's famous manual of moral philosophy. His Latin learning extended over a wide range of literature, from Virgil and Ovid down to some of the favourite Latin poets of the Middle Ages. It is to be feared that he occasionally read Latin authors with so eager a desire to arrive at the contents of their books that he at times mistook their meaning—not far otherwise, slightly to vary a happy comparison made by one of his most eminent commentators, than many people read Chaucer's own writings now-a-days. That he possessed any knowledge at all of Greek may be doubted, both on general grounds and on account of a little slip or two in quotation of a kind not unusual with those who quote what they have not previously read. His *Troilus and Cressid* has only a very distant connexion indeed with Homer, whose *Iliad*, before it furnished materials for the mediæval Troilus-legend, had been filtered through a brief Latin epitome, and diluted into a Latin novel, and a journal kept at the seat of war, of altogether apocryphal value. And, indeed, it must in general be conceded that, if Chaucer had read much, he lays claim to having read more; for he not only occasionally ascribes to known authors works which we can by no means feel certain as to their having written, but at times he even cites (or is made to cite in all the editions of his works, authors who are altogether unknown to fame by the names which he gives to them. But then it must be remembered that other mediæval writers have rendered themselves liable to the same kind of charge. Quoting was one of the dominant literary fashions of the age; and just as a word without an oath went for but little in conversation, so a statement or sentiment in writing acquired a

greatly enhanced value when suggested by authority, even after no more precise a fashion than the use of the phrase "as old books say." In Chaucer's days the equivalent of the modern "I have seen it said *somewhere*"—with perhaps the venturesome addition: "I *think*, in Horace"—had clearly not become an objectionable expletive.

Of modern literatures there can be no doubt that Chaucer had made substantially his own, the two which could be of importance to him as a poet. His obligations to the French singers have probably been over-estimated—at all events if the view adopted in this essay be the correct one, and if the charming poem of the *Flower and the Leaf*, together with the lively, but as to its meaning not very transparent, so-called *Chaucer's Dream*, be denied admission among his genuine works. At the same time, the influence of the *Roman de la Rose* and that of the courtly poets, of whom Machault was the chief in France and Froissart the representative in England, are perceptible in Chaucer almost to the last, nor is it likely that he should ever have ceased to study and assimilate them. On the other hand, the extent of his knowledge of Italian literature has probably till of late been underrated in an almost equal degree. This knowledge displays itself not only in the imitation or adaptation of particular poems, but more especially in the use made of incidental passages and details. In this way his debts to Dante were especially numerous; and it is curious to find proofs so abundant of Chaucer's relatively close study of a poet with whose genius his own had so few points in common. Notwithstanding first appearances, it is an open question whether Chaucer had ever read Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, with which he may merely have had in common the sources of several of his *Canterbury Tales*. But as he certainly took

one of them from the *Teseide* (without improving it in the process), and not less certainly, and adapted the *Filostrato* in his *Troilus and Cressid*, it is strange that he should refrain from naming the author to whom he was more indebted than to any one other for poetic materials.

But wide and diverse as Chaucer's reading fairly deserves to be called, the love of nature was even stronger and more absorbing in him than the love of books. He has himself, in a very charming passage, compared the strength of the one and of the other of his predilections :—

> And as for me, though I have knowledge slight,
> In bookës for to read I me delight,
> And to them give I faith and full credénce,
> And in my heart have them in reverence
> So heartily, that there is gamë none
> That from my bookës maketh me be gone,
> But it be seldom on the holiday,—
> Save, certainly, when that the month of May
> Is come, and that I hear the fowlës sing,
> And see the flowers as they begin to spring,
> Farewell my book, and my devotión.

Undoubtedly the literary fashion of Chaucer's times is responsible for part of this May-morning sentiment, with which he is fond of beginning his poems (the Canterbury pilgrimage is dated towards the end of April—but is not April "messenger to May"?). It had been decreed that flowers should be the badges of nations and dynasties, and the tokens of amorous sentiment; the rose had its votaries, and the lily, lauded by Chaucer's *Prioress* as the symbol of the Blessed Virgin; while the daisy, which first sprang from the tears of a forlorn damsel, in France gave its name (*marguérite*) to an entire species of courtly verse. The enthusiastic adoration professed by Chaucer,

in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, for the daisy, which he afterwards identifies with the good Alceste, the type of faithful wifehood, is of course a mere poetical figure. But there is in his use of these favourite literary devices, so to speak, a variety in sameness significant of their accordance with his own taste, and of the frank and fresh love of nature which animated him, and which seems to us as much a part of him as his love of books. It is unlikely that his personality will ever become more fully known than it is at present; nor is there anything in respect of which we seem to see so clearly into his inner nature, as with regard to these twin predilections, to which he remains true in all his works, and in all his moods. While the study of books was his chief passion, nature was his chief joy and solace; while his genius enabled him to transfuse what he read in the former, what came home to him in the latter was akin to that genius itself; for he at times reminds us of his own fresh Canace, whom he describes as looking so full of happiness during her walk through the wood at sunrise :—

> What for the season, what for the morníng
> And for the fowlës that she heardë sing,
> For right anon she wistë what they meant
> Right by their song, and knew all their intent.

If the above view of Chaucer's character and intellectual tastes and tendencies be in the main correct, there will seem to be nothing paradoxical in describing his literary progress, so far as its *data* are ascertainable, as a most steady and regular one. Very few men awake to find themselves either famous or great of a sudden, and perhaps as few poets as other men, though it may be heresy against a venerable maxim to say so. Chaucer's works form a clearly recognisable

series of steps towards the highest achievement of which, under the circumstances in which he lived and wrote, he can be held to have been capable; and his long and arduous self-training, whether consciously or not directed to a particular end, was of that sure kind from which genius itself derives strength. His beginnings as a writer were dictated, partly by the impulse of that imitative faculty which, in poetic natures, is the usual precursor of the creative, partly by the influence of prevailing tastes and the absence of native English literary predecessors whom, considering the circumstances of his life and the nature of his temperament, he could have found it a congenial task to follow. French poems were, accordingly, his earliest models; but fortunately (unlike Gower, whom it is so instructive to compare with Chaucer, precisely because the one lacked that gift of genius which the other possessed) he seems at once to have resolved to make use for his poetical writings of his native speech. In no way, therefore, could he have begun his career with so happy a promise of its future, as in that which he actually chose. Nor could any course so naturally have led him to introduce into his poetic diction the French idioms and words already used in the spoken language of Englishmen, more especially in those classes for which he in the first instance wrote, and thus to confer upon our tongue the great benefit which it owes to him. Again most fortunately, others had already pointed the way to the selection for literary use of that English dialect which was probably the most suitable for the purpose; and Chaucer as a Southern man (like his *Parson of a Town*) belonged to a part of the country where the old alliterative verse had long since been discarded for classical and romance forms of versification. Thus the *Romaunt of the Rose* most suitably

opens his literary life—a translation in which there is nothing original except an occasional turn of phrase, but in which the translator finds opportunity for exercising his powers of judgment by virtually re-editing the work before him. And already in the *Book of the Duchess*, though most unmistakeably a follower of Machault, he is also the rival of the great French *trouvère*, and has advanced in freedom of movement not less than in agreeableness of form. Then, as his travels extended his acquaintance with foreign literatures to that of Italy, he here found abundant fresh materials from which to feed his productive powers, and more elaborate forms in which to clothe their results; while at the same time comparison, the kindly nurse of originality, more and more enabled him to recast instead of imitating, or encouraged him freely to invent. In *Troilus and Cressid* he produced something very different from a mere condensed translation, and achieved a work in which he showed himself a master of poetic expression and sustained narrative; in the *House of Fame* and the *Assembly of Fowls* he moved with freedom in happily contrived allegories of his own invention; and with the *Legend of Good Women* he had already arrived at a stage when he could undertake to review, under a pleasant pretext, but with evident consciousness of work done, the list of his previous works. "He hath," he said of himself, "made many a lay and many a thing." Meanwhile the labour incidentally devoted by him to translation from the Latin, or to the composition of prose treatises in the scholastic manner of academical exercises, could but little affect his general literary progress. The mere scholarship of youth, even if it be the reverse of close and profound, is wont to cling to a man through life and to assert its modest claims at any season; and thus, Chaucer's school-learning exercised

little influence either of an advancing or of a retarding kind upon the full development of his genius. Nowhere is he so truly himself as in the masterpiece of his last years. For the *Canterbury Tales*, in which he is at once greatest, most original, and most catholic in the choice of materials as well as in moral sympathies, bears the unmistakeable stamp of having formed the crowning labour of his life—a work which death alone prevented him from completing.

It may be said, without presumption, that such a general view as this leaves ample room for all reasonable theories as to the chronology and sequence, where these remain more or less unsettled, of Chaucer's indisputably genuine works. In any case, there is no poet whom, if only as an exercise in critical analysis, it is more interesting to study and re-study in connexion with the circumstances of his literary progress. He still, as has been seen, belongs to the Middle Ages, but to a period in which the noblest ideals of these Middle Ages are already beginning to pale and their mightiest institutions to quake around him; in which learning continues to be in the main scholasticism, the linking of argument with argument, and the accumulation of authority upon authority, and poetry remains to a great extent the crabbedness of clerks or the formality of courts. Again, Chaucer is mediæval in tricks of style and turns of phrase; he often contents himself with the tritest of figures and the most unrefreshing of ancient devices, and freely resorts to a mixture of names and associations belonging to his own times with others derived from other ages. This want of literary perspective is a sure sign of mediævalism, and one which has amused the world, or has jarred upon it, since the Renascence taught men to study both classical and biblical antiquity as realities, and not merely

as a succession of pictures or of tapestries on a wall. Chaucer mingles things mediæval and things classical as freely as he brackets King David with the philosopher Seneca, or Judas Iscariot with the Greek "dissimulator" Sinon. His Dido, mounted on a stout palfrey paper white of hue, with a red-and-gold saddle embroidered and embossed, resembles Alice Perrers in all her pomp rather than the Virgilian queen. Jupiter's eagle, the poet's guide and instructor in the allegory of the *House of Fame*, invokes "Saint Mary, Saint James," and "Saint Clare" all at once; and the pair of lovers at Troy sign their letters "*la vostre* T." and *la vostre C.*" Anachronisms of this kind (of the danger of which, by the way, to judge from a passage in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer would not appear to have been wholly unconscious) are intrinsically of very slight importance. But the morality of Chaucer's narratives is at times the artificial and overstrained morality of the Middle Ages, which, as it were, clutches hold of a single idea to the exclusion of all others—a morality which, when carried to its extreme consequences, makes monomaniacs as well as martyrs, in both of which species, occasionally perhaps combined in the same persons, the Middle Ages abound. The fidelity of Griseldis under the trials imposed upon her by her, in point of fact, brutal husband is the fidelity of a martyr to unreason. The story was afterwards put on the stage in the Elizabethan age; and though even in the play of *Patient Grissil* (by Chettle and others), it is not easy to reconcile the husband's proceedings with the promptings of common sense, yet the playwrights, with the instinct of their craft, contrived to introduce some element of humanity into his character and of probability into his conduct.

Again, the supra-chivalrous respect paid by Arviragus, the Breton knight of the *Franklin's Tale*, to the sanctity of his wife's word, seriously to the peril of his own and his wife's honour, is an effort to which probably even the Knight of La Mancha himself would have proved unequal. It is not to be expected that Chaucer should have failed to share some of the prejudices of his times as well as to fall in with their ways of thought and sentiment; and though it is the *Prioress* who tells a story against the Jews which passes the legend of Hugh of Lincoln, yet it would be very hazardous to seek any irony in this legend of bigotry. In general, much of that *naïveté* which to modern readers seems Chaucer's most obvious literary quality must be ascribed to the times in which he lived and wrote. This quality is in truth by no means that which most deeply impresses itself upon the observation of any one able to compare Chaucer's writings with those of his more immediate predecessors and successors. But the sense in which the term *naïf* should be understood in literary criticism is so imperfectly agreed upon among us, that we have not yet even found an English equivalent for the word.

To Chaucer's times, then, belongs much of what may at first sight seem to include itself among the characteristics of his genius; while, on the other hand, there are to be distinguished from these the influences due to his training and studies in two literatures—the French and the Italian. In the former of these he must have felt at home, if not by birth and descent, at all events by social connexion, habits of life, and ways of thought, while in the latter he, whose own country's was still a half-fledged literary life, found ready to his hand masterpieces of artistic maturity, lofty in conception, broad in bearing, finished

in form. There still remain, for summary review, the elements proper to his own poetic individuality—those which mark him out not only as the first great poet of his own nation, but as a great poet for all times.

The poet must please; if he wishes to be successful and popular, he must suit himself to the tastes of his public; and even if he be indifferent to immediate fame, he must, as belonging to one of the most impressionable, the most receptive species of humankind, live in a sense *with* and *for* his generation. To meet this demand upon his genius, Chaucer was born with many gifts which he carefully and assiduously exercised in a long series of poetical experiments, and which he was able felicitously to combine for the achievement of results unprecedented in our literature. In readiness of descriptive power, in brightness and variety of imagery, and in flow of diction, Chaucer remained unequalled by any English poet, till he was surpassed—it seems not too much to say, in all three respects—by Spenser. His verse, where it suits his purpose, glitters, to use Dunbar's expression, as with fresh enamel, and its hues are variegated like those of a Flemish tapestry. Even where his descriptive enumerations seem at first sight monotonous or perfunctory, they are in truth graphic and true in their details, as in the list of birds in the *Assembly of Fowls*, quoted in part on an earlier page of this essay, and in the shorter list of trees in the same poem, which is, however, in its general features imitated from Boccaccio. Neither King James I. of Scotland, nor Spenser, who after Chaucer essayed similar *tours de force*, were happier than he had been before them. Or we may refer to the description of the preparations for the tournament and of the tournament itself in the *Knight's Tale*, or to the thoroughly Dutch picture of a disturbance in a farm-yard

in the *Nun's Priest's*. The vividness with which Chaucer describes scenes and events as if he had them before his own eyes, was no doubt, in the first instance, a result of his own imaginative temperament; but one would probably not go wrong in attributing the fulness of the use which he made of this gift to the influence of his Italian studies—more especially to those which led him to Dante, whose multitudinous characters and scenes impress themselves with so singular and immediate a definiteness upon the imagination. At the same time, Chaucer's resources seem inexhaustible for filling up or rounding off his narratives with the aid of chivalrous love or religious legend, by the introduction of samples of scholastic discourse or devices of personal or general allegory. He commands, where necessary, a rhetorician's readiness of illustration, and a masque-writer's inventiveness, as to machinery; he can even (in the *House of Fame*) conjure up an elaborate but self-consistent phantasmagory of his own, and continue it with a fulness proving that his fancy would not be at a loss for supplying even more materials than he cares to employ.

But Chaucer's poetry derived its power to please from yet another quality; and in this he was the first of our English poets to emulate the poets of the two literatures to which in the matter of his productions, and in the ornaments of his diction, he owed so much. There is in his verse a music which hardly ever wholly loses itself, and which at times is as sweet as that in any English poet after him.

This assertion is not one which is likely to be gainsaid at the present day, when there is not a single lover of Chaucer who would sit down contented with Dryden's condescending mixture of censure and praise. "The verse

of Chaucer," he wrote, "I confess, is not harmonious to us. They who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lydgate and Gower, his contemporaries: there is a rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect." At the same time, it is no doubt necessary, in order to verify the correctness of a less balanced judgment, to take the trouble, which, if it could but be believed, is by no means great, to master the rules and usages of Chaucerian versification. These rules and usages the present is not a fit occasion for seeking to explain.[1]

[1] It may, however, be stated that they only partially connect themselves with Chaucer's use of forms which are now obsolete—more especially of inflexions of verbs and substantives (including several instances of the famous final *e*), and contractions with the negative *ne* and other monosyllabic words ending in a vowel, of the initial syllables of words beginning with vowels or with the letter *h*. These and other variations from later usage in spelling and pronunciation—such as the occurrence of an *e* (sometimes sounded and sometimes not) at the end of words in which it is now no longer retained, and again the frequent accentuation of many words of French origin in their last syllable, as in French, and of certain words of English origin analogously—are to be looked for as a matter of course in a last writing in the period of our language in which Chaucer lived. He clearly foresaw the difficulties which would be caused to his readers by the variations of usage in spelling and pronunciation—variations to some extent rendered inevitable by the fact that he wrote in an English dialect which was only gradually coming to be accepted as the uniform language of English writers. Towards the close of his *Troilus and Cressid*, he thus addresses his "little book," in fear of the mangling it might undergo from scriveners who might blunder in the copying of its words, or from reciters who might maltreat its verse in the distribution of the accents:—

> And, since there is so great diversity
> In English, and in writing of our tongue.

With regard to the most important of them is it not too much to say that instinct and experience will very

---

I pray to God that none may miswrite thee
Nor thee mismetre, for default of tongue,
And wheresoe'er thou mayst be read or sung,
That thou be understood, God I beseech.

But in his versification he likewise adopted certain other practices which had no such origin or reason as those already referred to. Among them were the addition, at the end of a line of five accents, of an unaccented syllable; and the substitution, for the first foot of a line either of four or of five accents, of a single syllable. These deviations from a stricter system of versification he doubtless permitted to himself, partly for the sake of variety, and partly for that of convenience; but neither of them is peculiar to himself, or of supreme importance for the effect of his verse. In fact, he seems to allow as much in a passage of his *House of Fame*, a poem written, it should, however, be observed, in an easy-going form of verse (the line of four accents) which in his later period Chaucer seems with this exception to have invariably discarded. He here beseeches Apollo to make his rhyme

somewhat agreeáble,
Though some verse fail in a sylláble.

But another of his usages—the misunderstanding of which has more than anything else caused his art as a writer of verse to be misjudged—seems to have been due to a very different cause. To understand the real nature of the usage in question it is only necessary to seize the principle of Chaucer's rhythm. Of this principle it was well said many years ago by a most competent authority—Mr. R. Horne—that it is "inseparable from a full or fair exercise of the genius of our language in versification." For though this usage in its full freedom was gradually again lost to our poetry for a time, yet it was in a large measure recovered by Shakspere and the later dramatists of our great age, and has since been never altogether abandoned again—not even by the correct writers of the Augustan period—till by the favourites of our own times it is resorted to with a perhaps excessive liberality. It consists simply in *slurring* over certain final syllables—not eliding them or contracting them with the

speedily combine to indicate to an intelligent reader where the poet has resorted to it. *Without* intelligence on the part of the reader, the beautiful harmonies of Mr. Tennyson's later verse remain obscure; so that, taken in this way the most musical of English verse may seem as difficult to read as the most rugged; but in the former case the lesson is learnt not to be lost again, in the latter the tumbling is ever beginning anew, as with the rock of Sisyphus. There is nothing that can fairly be called rugged in the verse of Chaucer.

And fortunately there are not many pages in this poet's works devoid of lines or passages the music of which cannot escape any ear, however unaccustomed it may be to his diction and versification. What is the nature of the art at whose bidding ten monosyllables arrange themselves into a line of the exquisite cadence of the following:—

> And she was fair, as is the rose in May?

Nor would it be easy to find lines surpassing in their melancholy charm Chaucer's version of the lament of Medea, when deserted by Jason,—a passage which makes the reader neglectful of the English poet's modest hint that the letter of the Colchian princess may be found at full length in Ovid. The lines shall be quoted *verbatim*, though not *literatim;* and perhaps no better example, and none more readily appreciable by a modern ear, could be given than the fourth of them of the harmonious effect of Chaucer's usage of *slurring*, referred to above:—

syllables following upon them, but passing over them lightly, so that, without being inaudible, they may at the same time not interfere with the rhythm or beat of the verse. This usage, by adding to the variety, incontestably adds to the flexibility and beauty of Chaucer's versification.

Why likèd thee my yellow hair to see
More than the boundës of mine honesty?
Why likèd me thy youth and thy fairnéss
And of thy tongue the infinite graciousness?
O, had'st thou in thy conquest dead y-bee(n),
Full myckle untruth had there died with thee.

Qualities and powers such as the above, have belonged to poets of very various times and countries before and after Chaucer. But in addition to these he most assuredly possessed others, which are not usual among the poets of our nation, and which, whencesoever they had come to him personally, had not, before they made their appearance in him, seemed indigenous to the English soil. It would indeed be easy to misrepresent the history of English poetry, during the period which Chaucer's advent may be said to have closed, by ascribing to it a uniformly solemn and serious, or even dark and gloomy, character. Such a description would not apply to the poetry of the period before the Norman Conquest, though, in truth, little room could be left for the play of fancy or wit in the hammered-out war-song, or in the long-drawn scriptural paraphrase. Nor was it likely that a contagious gaiety should find an opportunity of manifesting itself in the course of the versification of grave historical chronicles, or in the tranquil objective reproduction of the endless traditions of British legend. Of the popular songs belonging to the period after the Norman Conquest, the remains which furnish us with direct or indirect evidence concerning them hardly enable us to form an opinion. But we know that (the cavilling spirit of Chaucer's burlesque *Rhyme of Sir Thopas* notwithstanding) the efforts of English metrical romance in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were neither few nor feeble, although these romances were chiefly translations,

sometimes abridgments to boot—even the Arthurian cycle having been only imported across the Channel, though it may have thus come back to its original home. There is some animation in at least one famous chronicle in verse, dating from about the close of the thirteenth century; there is real spirit in the war-songs of Minot in the middle of the fourteenth; and from about its beginnings dates a satire full of broad fun concerning the jolly life led by the monks. But none of these works or of those contemporary with them show that innate lightness and buoyancy of tone, which seems to add wings to the art of poetry. Nowhere had the English mind found so real an opportunity of poetic utterance in the days of Chaucer's own youth as in Langland's unique work, national in its allegorical form and in its alliterative metre; and nowhere had this utterance been more stern and severe.

No sooner, however, has Chaucer made his appearance as a poet, than he seems to show what mistress's badge he wears, which party of the two that have at most times divided among them a national literature and its representatives he intends to follow. The burden of his song is "Si douce est la marguérite:" he has learnt the ways of French gallantry as if to the manner born, and thus becomes, as it were without hesitation or effort, the first English love-poet. Nor—though in the course of his career his range of themes, his command of materials, and his choice of forms are widely enlarged—is the gay banner under which he has ranged himself ever deserted by him. With the exception of the *House of Fame*, there is not one of his longer poems of which the passion of love, under one or another of its aspects, does not either constitute the main subject or (as in the *Canterbury Tales*) furnish the greater part of the contents. It is as a love-poet that Gower thinks of Chaucer

when paying a tribute to him in his own verse; it is to the attacks made upon him in his character as a love-poet, and to his consciousness of what he has achieved as such, that he gives expression in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, where his fair advocate tells the God of Love:—

> The man hath servèd you of his cunníng,
> And furthered well your law in his writíng,
> All be it that he cannot well indite,
> Yet hath he made unlearnèd folk delight
> To servë you in praising of your name.

And so he resumes his favourite theme once more, to tell, as the *Man of Law* says, "of lovers up and down, more than Ovid makes mention of in his old *Epistles*." This fact alone—that our first great English poet was also our first English love-poet, properly so called—would have sufficed to transform our poetic literature through his agency.

What, however, calls for special notice, in connexion with Chaucer's special poetic quality of gaiety and brightness, is the preference which he exhibits for treating the joyous aspects of this many-sided passion. Apart from the *Legend of Good Women*, which is specially designed to give brilliant examples of the faithfulness of women under circumstances of trial, pain, and grief, and from two or three of the *Canterbury Tales*, he dwells with consistent preference on the bright side of love, though remaining a stranger to its divine radiance, which shines forth so fully upon us out of the pages of Spenser. Thus, in the *Assembly of Fowls* all is gaiety and mirth, as indeed beseems the genial neighbourhood of Cupid's temple. Again, in *Troilus and Cressid*, the earlier and cheerful part of the love-story is that which he developes with unmistake-

able sympathy and enjoyment, and in his hands this part of the poem becomes one of the most charming poetic narratives of the birth and growth of young love, which our literature possesses—a soft and sweet counterpart to the consuming heat of Marlowe's unrivalled *Hero and Leander*. With Troilus it was love at first sight—with Cressid a passion of very gradual growth. But so full of nature is the narrative of this growth, that one is irresistibly reminded at more than one point of the inimitable creations of the great modern master in the description of women's love. Is there not a touch of Gretchen in Cressid, retiring into her chamber to ponder over the first revelation to her of the love of Troilus?—

> Cressid arose, no longer there she stayed,
> But straight into her closet went anon,
> And set her down, as still as any stone,
> And every word gan up and down to wind,
> That he had said, as it came to her mind.

And is there not a touch of Clärchen in her—though with a difference—when from her casement she blushingly beholds her lover riding past in triumph:

> So like a man of armës and a knight
> He was to see, filled full of high prowëss,
> For both he had a body, and a might
> To do that thing, as well as hardiness;
> And eke to see him in his gear him dress,
> So fresh, so young, so wieldly seemèd he,
> It truly was a heaven him for to see.
>
> His helm was hewn about in twenty places,
> That by a tissue hung his back behind,
> His shield was dashed with strokes of swords and maces
> In which men mightë many an arrow find
> That piercèd had the horn and nerve and rind;
> And aye the people cried: "Here comes our joy,
> And, next his brother, holder up of Troy."

Even in the very *Book of the Duchess*, the widowed lover describes the maiden charms of his lost wife with so lively a freshness as almost to make one forget that it is a *lost* wife whose praises are being recorded.

The vivacity and joyousness of Chaucer's poetic temperament, however, show themselves in various other ways besides his favourite manner of treating a favourite theme. They enhance the spirit of his passages of dialogue, and add force and freshness to his passages of description. They make him amusingly impatient of epical lengths, abrupt in his transitions, and anxious, with an anxiety usually manifested by readers rather than by writers, to come to the point, "to the great effect," as he is wont to call it. "Men," he says, "may overlade a ship or barge, and therefore I will skip at once to the effect, and let all the rest slip." And he unconsciously suggests a striking difference between himself and the great Elizabethan epic poet who owes so much to him, when he declines to make as long a tale of the chaff or of the straw as of the corn, and to describe all the details of a marriage-feast *seriatim*:

> The fruit of every tale is for to say:
> They eat and drink, and dance and sing and play.

This may be the fruit; but epic poets, from Homer downwards, have been generally in the habit of not neglecting the foliage. Spenser in particular has that impartial copiousness which we think it our duty to admire in the Ionic epos, but which, if the truth were told, has prevented generations of Englishmen from acquiring an intimate personal acquaintance with the *Fairy Queen*. With Chaucer the danger certainly rather lay in an opposite direction. Most assuredly he can tell a story with admirable point and precision, when he wishes to do so.

Perhaps no better example of his skill in this respect could be cited than the *Manciple's Tale*, with its rapid narrative, its major and minor catastrophe, and its concise moral, ending thus :—

> My son, beware, and be no author new
> Of tidings, whether they be false or true ;
> Whereso thou comest, among high or low,
> Keep well thy tongue, and think upon the crow.

At the same time, his frequently recurring announcements of his desire to be brief have the effect of making his narrative appear to halt, and thus unfortunately defeat their own purpose. An example of this may be found in the *Knight's Tale*, a narrative poem of which, in contrast with its beauties, a want of evenness is one of the chief defects. It is not that the desire to suppress redundancies is a tendency deserving anything but commendation in any writer, whether great or small ; but rather, that the art of concealing art had not yet dawned upon Chaucer. And yet, few writers of any time have taken a more evident pleasure in the process of literary production, and have more visibly overflowed with sympathy for, or antipathy against, the characters of their own creation. Great novelists of our own age have often told their readers, in prefaces to their fictions or in *quasi*-confidential comments upon them, of the intimacy in which they have lived with the offspring of their own brain, to them far from shadowy beings. But only the *naïveté* of Chaucer's literary age, together with the vivacity of his manner of thought and writing, could place him in so close a personal relation towards the personages and the incidents of his poems. He is overcome by "pity and ruth" as he reads of suffering, and his eyes "wax foul and sore" as he prepares to tell of its infliction. He compassionates "love's servants" as

e were their own "brother dear;" and into his tation of the eventful story of Constance (the *Man of 's Tale*) he introduces apostrophe upon apostrophe, to lefenceless condition of his heroine—to her relentless ıy the Sultana, and to Satan, who ever makes his ument of women "when he will beguile"—to the ken messenger who allowed the letter carried by him e stolen from him,—and to the treacherous Queen- ıer who caused them to be stolen. Indeed, in address- the last-named personage, the poet seems to lose all rol over himself.

> O Domegild, I have no English digne
> Unto thy malice and thy tyranny:
> And therefore to the fiend I thee resign,
> Let him at length tell of thy treachery.
> Fye, mannish, fye!—Oh nay, by God, I lie;
> Fye fiendish spirit, for I dare well tell,
> Though thou here walk, thy spirit is in hell.

he opening of the *Legend of Ariadne* he bids Minos en with shame; and towards its close, when narrating Theseus sailed away, leaving his true-love behind, he esses a hope that the wind may drive the traitor "a ıty devil way." Nor does this vivacity find a less ing expression in so trifling a touch as that in the *'s Tale*, where the domestic sent to deprive Griseldis er boy becomes, *eo ipso* as it were, "this ugly ser- t."

losely allied to Chaucer's liveliness and gaiety of dis- ion, and in part springing from them, are his keen of the ridiculous and the power of satire which he at his command. His humour has many varieties, ing from the refined and half-melancholy irony of the *e of Fame* to the ready wit of the sagacious uncle of

Cressid, the burlesque fun of the inimitable *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and the very gross salt of the *Reeve*, the *Miller*, and one or two others. The springs of humour often capriciously refuse to allow themselves to be discovered; nor is the satire of which the direct intention is transparent invariably the most effective species of satire. Concerning, however, Chaucer's use of the power which he in so large a measure possessed, viz. that of covering with ridicule the palpable vices or weaknesses of the classes or kinds of men represented by some of his character-types, one assertion may be made with tolerable safety. Whatever may have been the first stimulus and the ultimate scope of the wit and humour which he here expended, they are *not* to be explained as moral indignation in disguise. And in truth Chaucer's merriment flows spontaneously from a source very near the surface; he is so extremely diverting, because he is so extremely diverted himself.

Herein, too, lies the harmlessness of Chaucer's fun. Its harmlessness, to wit, for those who are able to read him in something like the spirit in which he wrote—never a very easy achievement with regard to any author, and one which the beginner and the young had better be advised to abstain from attempting with Chaucer in the overflow of his more or less unrestrained moods. At all events, the excuse of gaiety of heart—the plea of that *vieil esprit Gaulois* which is so often, and very rarely without need, invoked in an exculpatory capacity by modern French criticism—is the best defence ever made for Chaucer's laughable irregularities, either by his apologists or by himself. "Men should not," he says, and says very truly, "make earnest of game." But when he audaciously defends himself against the charge of

impropriety by declaring that he must tell stories *in character*, and coolly requests any person who may find anything in one of his tales objectionable to turn to another:—

> For he shall find enough, both great and small,
> Of storial thing that toucheth gentleness,
> Likewise morality and holiness;
> Blame ye not me, if ye should choose amiss—

we are constrained to shake our heads at the transparent sophistry of the plea, which requires no exposure. For Chaucer knew very well how to give life and colour to his page without recklessly disregarding bounds the neglect of which was even in his day offensive to many besides the "*precious* folk" of whom he half derisively pretends to stand in awe. In one instance he defeated his own purpose; for the so-called *Cook's Tale of Gamelyn* was substituted by some earlier editor for the original *Cook's Tale*, which has thus in its completed form become a rarity removed beyond the reach of even the most ardent of curiosity hunters. Fortunately, however, Chaucer spoke the truth when he said that from this point of view he had written very differently at different times; no whiter pages remain than many of his.

But the realism of Chaucer is something more than exuberant love of fun and light-hearted gaiety. He is the first great painter of character, because he is the first great observer of it among modern European writers. His power of comic observation need not be dwelt upon again, after the illustrations of it which have been incidentally furnished in these pages. More especially with regard to the manners and ways of women, which often, while seeming so natural to women themselves, appear so odd to male observers, Chaucer's eye was ever on the alert. But

his works likewise contain passages displaying a penetrating insight into the minds of men, as well as a keen eye for their manners, together with a power of generalising, which, when kept within due bonds, lies at the root of the wise knowledge of humankind so admirable to us in our great essayists, from Bacon to Addison and his modern successors. How truly, for instance, in *Troilus and Cressid*, Chaucer observes on the enthusiastic belief of converts, the "strongest-faithed" of men, as he understands! And how fine is the saying as to the suspiciousness characteristic of lewd, (i.e. ignorant,) people, that to things which are made more subtly

> Than they can in their lewdness comprehend,

they gladly give the worst interpretation which suggests itself! How appositely the *Canon's Yeoman* describes the arrogance of those who are too clever by half; "when a man has an over-great wit," he says, "it very often chances to him to misuse it"! And with how ripe a wisdom, combined with ethics of true gentleness, the honest *Franklin*, at the opening of his *Tale*, discourses on the uses and the beauty of long-suffering:—

> For one thing, sirës, safely dare I say,
> That friends the one the other must obey,
> If they will longë holdë company.
> Love will not be constrain'd by mastery.
> When mastery comes, the god of love anon
> Beateth his wings—and, farewell! he is gone.
> Love is a thing as any spirit free.
> Women desire, by nature, liberty,
> And not to be constrainèd as a thrall,
> And so do men, if I the truth say shall.
> Look, who that is most patiént in love,
> He is at his advantage all above.
> A virtue high is patiénce, certaín,

Because it vanquisheth, as clerks explain,
Things to which rigour never could attain.
For every word men should not chide and plain;
Learn ye to suffer, or else, so may I go,
Ye shall it learn, whether ye will or no.
For in this world certain no wight there is
Who neither doth nor saith some time amiss.
Sickness or ire, or constellation,
Wine, woe, or changing of complexion,
Causeth full oft to do amiss or speak.
For every wrong men may not vengeance wreak:
After a time there must be temperance
With every wight that knows self-governance.

It was by virtue of his power of observing and drawing character, above all, that Chaucer became the true predecessor of two several growths in our literature, in both of which characterisation forms a most important element,—it might perhaps be truly said, the element which surpasses all others in importance. From this point of view the dramatic poets of the Elizabethan age remain unequalled by any other school or group of dramatists, and the English novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the representatives of any other development of prose-fiction. In the art of construction, in the invention and the arrangement of incident, these dramatists and novelists may have been left behind by others; in the creation of character they are on the whole without rivals in their respective branches of literature. To the earlier at least of these growths Chaucer may be said to have pointed the way. His personages, more especially of course, as has been seen, those who are assembled together in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, are not mere phantasms of the brain, or even mere actual possibilities, but real human beings, and types true to the likeness of whole classes of men and women, or to the mould in which all

human nature is cast. This is upon the whole the most wonderful, as it is perhaps the most generally recognised, of Chaucer's gifts. It would not of itself have sufficed to make him a great dramatist, had the drama stood ready for him as a literary form into which to pour the inspirations of his genius, as it afterwards stood ready for our great Elizabethans. But to it were added in him that perception of a strong dramatic situation, and that power of finding the right words for it, which have determined the success of many plays, and the absence of which materially detracts from the completeness of the effect of others, high as their merits may be in other respects. How thrilling, for instance, is that rapid passage across the stage, as one might almost call it, of the unhappy Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale!* The antecedents of the situation, to be sure, are, as has been elsewhere suggested, absurd enough; but who can fail to feel that spasm of anxious sympathy with which a powerful dramatic situation in itself affects us, when the wife, whom for truth's sake her husband has bidden be untrue to him, goes forth on her unholy errand of duty? "Whither so fast?" asks the lover:

> And she made answer, half as she were mad:
> "Unto the garden, as my husband bade,
> My promise for to keep, alas! alas!"

Nor, as the abbreviated prose version of the *Pardoner's Tale* given above will suffice to show, was Chaucer deficient in the art of dramatically arranging a story; while he is not excelled by any of our non-dramatic poets in the spirit and movement of his dialogue. The *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*, but more especially *Troilus and Cressid* and the connecting passages between some of the *Canterbury Tales*, may be referred to in various illustration of this.

The vividness of his imagination, which conjures up, so to speak, the very personality of his characters before him, and the contagious force of his pathos, which is as true and as spontaneous as his humour, complete in him the born dramatist. We can see Constance as with our own eyes, in the agony of her peril :—

> Have ye not seen some time a pallid face
> Among a press, of him that hath been led
> Towards his death, where him awaits no grace,
> And such a colour in his face hath had,
> Men mightē know his face was so bested
> 'Mong all the other faces in that rout?
> So stands Constánce, and looketh her about.

And perhaps there is no better way of studying the general character of Chaucer's pathos, than a comparison of the *Monk's Tale* from which this passage is taken, and the *Clerk's Tale*, with their originals. In the former, for instance, the prayer of Constance, when condemned through Domegild's guilt to be cast adrift once more on the waters, her piteous words and tenderness to her little child, as it lies weeping in her arm, and her touching leave-taking from the land of the husband who has condemned her,—all these are Chaucer's own. So also are parts of one of the most affecting passages in the *Clerk's Tale*—Griseldis' farewell to her daughter. But it is as unnecessary to lay a finger upon lines and passages illustrating Chaucer's pathos, as upon others illustrating his humour.

Thus, then, Chaucer was a born dramatist; but fate willed it, that the branch of our literature which might probably have of all been the best suited to his genius was not to spring into life till he and several generations after him had passed away. To be sure, during the

fourteenth century, the so-called miracle-plays flourished abundantly in England, and were, as there is every reason to believe, already largely performed by the trading-companies of London and the towns. The allusions in Chaucer to these beginnings of our English drama are, however, remarkably scanty. The *Wife of Bath* mentions plays of miracles among the other occasions of religious sensation haunted by her, clad in her gay scarlet gown,—including vigils, processions, preachings, pilgrimages, and marriages. And the jolly parish-clerk of the *Miller's Tale*, we are informed, at times, in order to show his lightness and his skill, played "Herod on a scaffold high"—thus, by the bye, emulating the parish clerks of London, who are known to have been among the performers of miracles in the Middle Ages. The allusion to Pilate's voice in the *Miller's Prologue*, and that in the *Tale* to

> The sorrow of Noah with his fellowship
> That he had ere he got his wife to ship,

seem likewise dramatic reminiscences; and the occurrence of these three allusions in a single *Tale* and its *Prologue* would incline one to think that Chaucer had recently amused himself at one of these performances. But plays are not mentioned among the entertainments enumerated at the opening of the *Pardoner's Tale;* and it would in any case have been unlikely that Chaucer should have paid much attention to diversions which were long chiefly "visited" by the classes with which he could have no personal connexion, and even at a much later date were dissociated in men's minds from poetry and literature. Had he ever written anything remotely partaking of the nature of a dramatic piece, it could at the most have been the words of the songs in some congratulatory royal

pageant such as Lydgate probably wrote on the return of Henry V. after Agincourt; though there is not the least reason for supposing Chaucer to have taken so much interest in the "ridings" through the City which occupied many a morning of the idle apprentice of the *Cook's Tale*, Perkyn Revellour. It is perhaps more surprising to find Chaucer, who was a reader of several Latin poets, and who had heard of more, both Latin and Greek, show no knowledge whatever of the ancient classical drama, with which he may accordingly be fairly concluded to have been wholly unacquainted.

To one further aspect of Chaucer's realism as a poet reference has already been made; but a final mention of it may most appropriately conclude this sketch of his poetical characteristics. His descriptions of nature are as true as his sketches of human character; and incidental touches in him reveal his love of the one as unmistakeably as his unflagging interest in the study of the other. Even these May-morning *exordia*, in which he was but following a fashion—faithfully observed both by the French *trouvères* and by the English romances translated from their productions, and not forgotten by the author of the earlier part of the *Roman de la Rose*—always come from his hands with the freshness of natural truth. They cannot be called original in conception, and it would be difficult to point out in them anything strikingly original in execution; yet they cannot be included among those matter-of-course notices of morning and evening, sunrise and sunset, to which so many poets have accustomed us since (be it said with reverence) Homer himself. In Chaucer these passages make his page "as fresh as is the month of May." When he went forth on these April and May mornings, it was not solely with the intent of

composing a roundelay or a *marguérite;* but we may be well assured, he allowed the song of the little birds, the perfume of the flowers, and the fresh verdure of the English landscape, to sink into his very soul. For nowhere does he seem, and nowhere could he have been, more open to the influence which he received into himself, and which in his turn he exercised, and exercises, upon others, than when he was in fresh contact with nature. In this influence lies the secret of his genius; in his poetry there is *life*.

CHAPTER IV.

EPILOGUE.

THE legacy which Chaucer left to our literature was to fructify in the hands of a long succession of heirs; and it may be said, with little fear of contradiction, that at no time has his fame been fresher and his influence upon our poets—and upon our painters as well as our poets—more perceptible than at the present day. When Gower first put forth his *Confessio Amantis*, we may assume that Chaucer's poetical labours, of the fame of which his brother-poet declared the land to be full, had not yet been crowned by his last and greatest work. As a poet, therefore, Gower in one sense owes less to Chaucer than did many of their successors; though, on the other hand it may be said with truth that to Chaucer is due the fact, that Gower (whose earlier productions were in French and in Latin) ever became a poet at all. The *Confessio Amantis* is no book for all times like the *Canterbury Tales;* but the conjoined names of Chaucer and Gower added strength to one another in the eyes of the generations ensuing, little anxious as these generations were to distinguish which of the pair was really the first to "garnish our English rude" with the flowers of a new poetic diction and art of verse.

The Lancaster period of our history had its days of

national glory as well as of national humiliation, and indisputably, as a whole, advanced the growth of the nation towards political manhood. But it brought with it no golden summer to fulfil the promises of the spring-tide of our modern poetical literature. The two poets whose names stand forth from the barren after-season of the earlier half of the fifteenth century, were, both of them, according to their own profession, disciples of Chaucer. In truth, however, Occleve, the only name-worthy poetical writer of the reign of Henry IV., seems to have been less akin as an author to Chaucer than to Gower, while his principal poem manifestly was, in an even greater degree than the *Confessio Amantis*, a severely learned or, as its author terms it, unbuxom book. Lydgate, on the other hand, the famous monk of Bury, has in him something of the spirit as well as of the manner of Chaucer, under whose advice he is said to have composed one of his principal poems. Though a monk, he was no stay-at-home or do-nothing; like him of the *Canterbury Tales*, we may suppose Lydgate to have scorned the maxim that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water; and doubtless many days which he could spare from the instruction of youth at St. Edmund's Bury were spent about the London streets, of the sights and sounds of which he has left us so vivacious a record—a kind of farcical supplement to the *Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales*. His literary career, part of which certainly belongs to the reign of Henry V., has some resemblance to Chaucer's, though it is less regular and less consistent with itself; and several of his poems bear more or less distinct traces of Chaucer's influence. The *Troy-book* is not founded on *Troilus and Cressid*, though it is derived from the sources which had fed the original of Chaucer's poem;

but the *Temple of Glass* seems to have been an imitation of the *House of Fame;* and the *Story of Thebes* is actually introduced by its author as an additional *Canterbury Tale*, and challenges comparison with the rest of the series into which it asks admittance. Both Occleve and Lydgate enjoyed the patronage of a prince of genius descended from the House, with whose founder Chaucer was so closely connected—Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. Meanwhile, the sovereign of a neighbouring kingdom was in all probability himself the agent who established the influence of Chaucer as predominant in the literature of his native land. The long though honourable captivity in England of King James I. of Scotland—the best poet among kings and the best king among poets, as he has been antithetically called—was consoled by the study of the "hymns" of his "dear masters, Chaucer and Gower," for the happiness of whose souls he prays at the close of his poem, *The King's Quair*. That most charming of love-allegories, in which the Scottish king sings the story of his captivity and of his deliverance by the sweet messenger of love, not only closely imitates Chaucer in detail, more especially at its opening, but is pervaded by his spirit. Many subsequent Scottish poets imitated Chaucer, and some of them loyally acknowledged their debts to him. Gawin Douglas in his *Palace of Honour*, and Henryson in his *Testament of Cressid* and elsewhere, are followers of the southern master. The wise and brave Sir David Lyndsay was familiar with his writings; and he was not only occasionally imitated, but praised with enthusiastic eloquence by William Dunbar, that "darling of the Scottish Muses," whose poetical merits Sir Walter Scott, from some points of view, can hardly be said to have exaggerated, when declaring him to have been "justly

raised to a level with Chaucer by every judge of poetry, to whom his obsolete language has not rendered him unintelligible." Dunbar knew that this Scottish language was but a form of that which, as he declared, Chaucer had made to "surmount every terrestrial tongue, as far as midnight is surmounted by a May morning."

Meanwhile, in England, the influence of Chaucer continued to live even during the dreary interval which separates from one another two important epochs of our literary history. Now, as in the days of the Norman kings, ballads orally transmitted were the people's poetry; and one of these popular ballads carried the story of *Patient Grissel* into regions where Chaucer's name was probably unknown. When, after the close of the troubled season of the Roses, our poetic literature showed the first signs of a revival, they consisted in a return to the old masters of the fourteenth century. The poetry of Hawes, the learned author of the crabbed *Pastime of Pleasure*, exhibits an undeniable continuity with that of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, to which triad he devotes a chapter of panegyric. Hawes, however, presses into the service of his allegory not only all the Virtues and all the Vices, whom from habit we can tolerate in such productions, but also Astronomy, Geometry, Arithmetic, and the rest of the seven Daughters of Doctrine, whom we *cannot;* and is altogether inferior to the least of his models. It is at the same time to his credit that he seems painfully aware of his inability to cope with either Chaucer or Lydgate as to vigour of invention. There is, in truth, more of the dramatic spirit of Chaucer in Barklay's *Ship of Fools*, which, though essentially a translation, achieved in England the popularity of an original work. For this poem, like the *Canterbury Tales*, introduces into its admirable

framework a variety of lifelike sketches of character and manners; it has in it that dramatic element which is so Chaucerian a characteristic. But the aim of its author was didactic, which Chaucer's had never been.

When with the poems of Surrey and Wyatt, and with the first attempts in the direction of the regular drama, the opening of the second great age in our literature approached, and when, about half a century afterwards, that age actually opened with an unequalled burst of varied productivity, it would seem as if Chaucer's influence might naturally enough have passed away, or at least become obscured. Such was not, however, the case, and Chaucer survived into the age of the English Renascence as an established English classic, in which capacity Caxton had honoured him by twice issuing an edition of his works from the Westminster printing-press. Henry VIII.'s favourite, the reckless but pithy satirist, Skelton, was alive to the merits of his great predecessor, and Skelton's patron, William Thynne, a royal official, busied himself with editing Chaucer's works. The loyal servant of Queen Mary, the wise and witty John Heywood, from whose *Interludes* the step is so short to the first regular English comedy, in one of these pieces freely plagiarised a passage in the *Canterbury Tales*. Tottel, the printer of the favourite poetic *Miscellany* published shortly before Queen Elizabeth's accession, included in his collection the beautiful lines, cited above, called *Good Counsel of Chaucer*. And when, at last, the Elizabethan era properly so-called began, the proof was speedily given that geniuses worthy of holding fellowship with Chaucer had assimilated into their own literary growth what was congruous to it in his, just as he had assimilated to himself—not always improving, but hardly ever merely borrowing

or taking over—much that he had found in the French *trouvères*, and in Italian poetry and prose. The first work which can be included in the great period of Elizabethan literature is the *Shepherd's Calendar*, where Spenser is still in a partly imitative stage; and it is Chaucer whom he imitates and extols in his poem, and whom his *alter ego*, the mysterious "*E. K.*," extols in preface and notes. The longest of the passages in which reference is made by Spenser to Chaucer, under the pseudonym of Tityrus, is more especially noteworthy, both as showing the veneration of the younger for the older poet and as testifying to the growing popularity of Chaucer at the time when Spenser wrote.

The same great poet's debt to his revered predecessor in the *Daphnaïda* has been already mentioned. The *Fairy Queen* is the masterpiece of an original mind, and its supreme poetic quality is a lofty magnificence upon the whole foreign to Chaucer's genius; but Spenser owed something more than his archaic forms to "Tityrus," with whose style he had erst disclaimed all ambition to match his pastoral pipe. In a well-known passage of his great epos he declares that it is through sweet infusion of the older poet's own spirit that he, the younger, follows the footing of his feet, in order so the rather to meet with his meaning. It was this, the romantic spirit proper, which Spenser sought to catch from Chaucer, but which, like all those who consciously seek after it, he transmuted into a new quality and a new power. With Spenser the change was into something mightier and loftier. He would, we cannot doubt, readily have echoed the judgment of his friend and brother-poet concerning Chaucer. "I know not," writes Sir Philip Sidney, "whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty

time could see so clearly, or that we, in this clear age, walk so stumblingly after him. Yet had he," adds Sidney with the generosity of a true critic, who is not lost in wonder at his own cleverness in discovering defects, "great wants, fit to be forgiven in so reverent an antiquity." And yet a third Elizabethan, Michael Drayton, pure of tone and high of purpose, joins his voice to those of Spenser and Sidney, hailing in the "noble Chaucer"

> —— the first of those that ever brake
> Into the Muses' treasure and first spake
> In weighty numbers,

and placing Gower, with a degree of judgment not reached by his and Chaucer's immediate successors, in his proper relation of poetic rank to his younger but greater contemporary.

To these names should be added that of George Puttenham—if he was indeed the author of the grave and elaborate treatise, dedicated to Lord Burghley, on *The Art of English Poësy*. In this work mention is repeatedly made of Chaucer, "father of our English poets;" and his learning, and "the natural of his pleasant wit," are alike judiciously commended. One of Puttenham's best qualities as a critic is that he never speaks without his book; and he comes very near to discovering Chaucer's greatest gift when noticing his excellence in *prosopographia*—a term which to Chaucer would perhaps have seemed to require translation. At the obsoleteness of Chaucer's own diction this critic, who writes entirely "for the better brought-up sort," is obliged to shake his learned head.

Enough has been said in the preceding pages to support the opinion that among the wants which fell to the lot of

Chaucer as a poet, perhaps the greatest (though Sidney would never have allowed this), was the want of poetic form most in harmony with his most characteristic gifts. The influence of Chaucer upon the dramatists of the Elizabethan age was probably rather indirect and general than direct and personal; but indications or illustrations of it may be traced in a considerable number of these writers, including perhaps among the earliest Richard Edwards as the author of a non-extant tragedy, *Palamon and Arcite*, and among the latest the author—or authors—of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Besides Fletcher and Shakspere, Greene, Nash and Middleton, and more especially Jonson (as both poet and grammarian), were acquainted with Chaucer's writings; so that it is perhaps rather a proof of the widespread popularity of the *Canterbury Tales* than the reverse, that they were not largely resorted to for materials by the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Under Charles I. *Troilus and Cressid* found a translator in Sir Francis Kynaston, whom Cartwright congratulated on having made it possible "that we read Chaucer now without a dictionary." A personage, however, in Cartwright's best known play, the Antiquary Moth, prefers to talk on his own account "genuine" Chaucerian English.

To pursue the further traces of the influence of Chaucer through such a literary aftergrowth as the younger Fletchers, into the early poems of Milton, would be beyond the purpose of the present essay. In the treasure-house of that great poet's mind were gathered memories and associations innumerable, though the sublimest flights of his genius soared aloft into regions whither the imagination of none of our earlier poets had preceded them. On the other hand, the days have passed for attention to be spared for the treatment experienced by

Chaucer in the Augustan Age, to which he was a barbarian only to be tolerated if put into the court-dress of the final period of civilisation. Still, even thus, he was not left altogether unread; nor was he in all cases adapted without a certain measure of success. The irrepressible vigour, and the frequent felicity, of Dryden's *Fables* contrast advantageously with the tame evenness of the *Temple of Fame*, an early effort by Pope, who had wit enough to imitate in a juvenile parody some of the grossest peculiarities of Chaucer's manner, but who would have been quite ashamed to reproduce him in a serious literary performance, without the inevitable polish and cadence of his own style of verse. Later modernisations — even of those which a band of poets in some instances singularly qualified for the task put forth in a collection published in the year 1841, and which, on the part of some of them at least, was the result of conscientious endeavour — it is needless to characterise here. Slight incidental use has been made of some of these in this essay, the author of which would gladly have abstained from printing a single modernised phrase or word—most of all any which he has himself been guilty of re-casting. The time cannot be far distant when even the least unsuccessful of such attempts will no longer be accepted, because no such attempts whatever will be any longer required. No Englishman or Englishwoman need go through a very long or very laborious apprenticeship in order to become able to read, understand, and enjoy what Chaucer himself wrote. But if this apprenticeship be too hard, then some sort of makeshift must be accepted, or antiquity must remain the "canker-worm" even of a great national poet, as Spenser said it had already in his day proved to be of Chaucer.

Meanwhile, since our poetic literature has long thrown off the shackles which forced it to adhere to one particular group of models, he is not a true English poet who should remain uninfluenced by any of the really great among his predecessors. If Chaucer has again, in a special sense, become the "master dear and father reverent" of some of our living poets, in a wider sense he must hold this relation to them all and to all their successors, so long as he continues to be known and understood. As it is, there are few worthies of our literature whose names seem to awaken thoughout the English-speaking world a readier sentiment of familiar regard; and in New England, where the earliest great poet of Old England is cherished not less warmly than among ourselves, a kindly cunning has thus limned his likeness:—

> An old man in a lodge within a park;
> The chamber walls depicted all around
> With portraiture of huntsman, hawk and hound,
> And the hurt deer. He listeneth to the lark,
> Whose song comes with the sunshine through the dark
> Of painted glass in leaden lattice bound;
> He listeneth and he laugheth at the sound,
> Then writeth in a book like any clerk.
> He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote
> The Canterbury Tales, and his old age
> Made beautiful with song; and as I read
> I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
> Of lark and linnet, and from every page
> Rise odours of ploughed field or flowery mead.

GLOSSARY.

Benoite = benedicite.
Clepe, call.
Deem, judge.
Despitous, angry to excess.
Digne, fit ;– disdainful.
Frere, friar.
Gentle, well-born.
Keep, care.
Languor, grief.
Meinie, following, household.
Meet, mate (?), measure (?).
Overthwart, across.
Parage, rank, degree.
Press, crowd.
Rede, advise, counsel.
Reeve, steward, bailiff.
Ruth, pity.
Scall, scab.
Shapely, fit.
Sithe, time.
Spiced, nice, scrupulous.
Targe, target, shield.
Y prefix of past participle as in *y-bee* = *bee*(*n*).
While, time; *to quite his while* to reward his pains.
Wieldy, active.
Wone, custom, habit.

*** A dotted ĕ should always be sounded in reading.

THE END.

glish Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

SPENSER

SPENSER

BY

R. W. CHURCH,

DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S,
HONORARY FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE.

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NOTICE.

As the plan of these volumes does not encourage foot-notes, I wish to say that, besides the biographies prefixed to the various editions of Spenser, there are two series of publications, which have been very useful to me. One is the series of Calendars of State Papers, especially the State Papers on Ireland and the Carew MSS. at Lambeth, with the prefaces of Mr. Hans Claude Hamilton and the late Professor Brewer. The other is Mr. E. Arber's series of reprints of old English books, and his Transcript of the Stationers' Registers, a work, I suppose, without parallel in its information about the early literature of a country, and edited by him with admirable care and public spirit. I wish also to say that I am much indebted to Mr. Craik's excellent little book on *Spenser and his Poetry.*

R. W. C.

March, 1879.

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SPENSER.

CHAPTER I.

SPENSER'S EARLY LIFE.

[1552—1579.]

SPENSER marks a beginning in English literature. He is the first Englishman who, in that great division of our history which dates from the Reformation, attempted and achieved a poetical work of the highest order. Born about the same time as Hooker (1552—1554), in the middle of that eventful century which began with Henry VIII., and ended with Elizabeth, he was the earliest of our great modern writers in poetry, as Hooker was the earliest of our great modern writers in prose. In that reviving English literature, which, after Chaucer's wonderful promise, had been arrested in its progress, first by the Wars of the Roses, and then by the religious troubles of the Reformation, these two were the writers who first realized to Englishmen the ideas of a high literary perfection. These ideas vaguely filled many minds; but no one had yet shown the genius and the strength to grasp and exhibit them in a way to challenge comparison with what had been accomplished by the poetry and prose of Greece, Rome, and

Italy. There had been poets in England since Chaucer, and prose writers since Wycliffe had translated the Bible. Surrey and Wyatt have deserved to live, while a crowd of poets, as ambitious as they, and not incapable of occasional force and sweetness, have been forgotten. Sir Thomas More, Roger Ascham, Tyndale, the translator of the New Testament, Bishop Latimer, the writers of many state documents, and the framers, either by translation or composition, of the offices of the English Prayer Book, showed that they understood the power of the English language over many of the subtleties and difficulties of thought, and were alive to the music of its cadences. Some of these works, consecrated by the highest of all possible associations, have remained, permanent monuments and standards of the most majestic and most affecting English speech. But the verse of Surrey, Wyatt, and Sackville, and the prose of More and Ascham were but noble and promising efforts. Perhaps the language was not ripe for their success; perhaps the craftsmen's strength and experience were not equal to the novelty of their attempt. But no one can compare the English styles of the first half of the sixteenth century with the contemporary styles of Italy, with Ariosto, Machiavelli, Guicciardini, without feeling the immense gap in point of culture, practice, and skill—the immense distance at which the Italians were ahead, in the finish and reach of their instruments, in their power to handle them, in command over their resources, and facility and ease in using them. The Italians were more than a century older; the English could not yet, like the Italians, say what they would; the strength of English was, doubtless, there in germ, but it had still to reach its full growth and development. Even the French prose of Rabelais and Montaigne was more mature. But in Spenser, as in Hooker, all these

tentative essays of vigorous but unpractised minds have led up to great and lasting works. We have forgotten all these preliminary attempts, crude and imperfect, to speak with force and truth, or to sing with measure and grace. There is no reason why they should be remembered, except by professed inquirers into the antiquities of our literature; they were usually clumsy and awkward, sometimes grotesque, often affected, always hopelessly wanting in the finish, breadth, moderation, and order which alone can give permanence to writing. They were the necessary exercises by which Englishmen were recovering the suspended art of Chaucer, and learning to write; and exercises, though indispensably necessary, are not ordinarily in themselves interesting and admirable. But when the exercises had been duly gone through, then arose the original and powerful minds, to take full advantage of what had been gained by all the practising, and to concentrate and bring to a focus all the hints and lessons of art which had been gradually accumulating. Then the sustained strength and richness of the *Faery Queen* became possible; contemporary with it, the grandeur and force of English prose began in Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity;* and then, in the splendid Elizabethan Drama, that form of art which has nowhere a rival, the highest powers of poetic imagination became wedded, as they had never been before in England or in the world, to the real facts of human life, and to its deepest thoughts and passions.

More is known about the circumstances of Spenser's life than about the lives of many men of letters of that time; yet our knowledge is often imperfect and inaccurate. The year 1552 is now generally accepted as the year of his birth. The date is inferred from a passage in one of his

Sonnets,[1] and this probably is near the truth. That is to say that Spenser was born in one of the last two years of Edward VI.; that his infancy was passed during the dark days of Mary; and that he was about six years old when Elizabeth came to the throne. About the same time were born Ralegh, and, a year or two later (1554), Hooker and Philip Sidney. Bacon (1561), and Shakespere (1564), belong to the next decade of the century.

He was certainly a Londoner by birth, and early training. This also we learn from himself, in the latest poem published in his life-time. It is a bridal ode (*Prothalamion*), to celebrate the marriage of two daughters of the Earl of Worcester, written late in 1596. It was a time in his life of disappointment and trouble, when he was only a rare visitor to London. In the poem he imagines himself on the banks of London's great river, and the bridal procession arriving at Lord Essex's house; and he takes occasion to record the affection with which he still regarded "the most kindly nurse" of his boyhood.

> Calm was the day, and through the trembling air
> Sweet-breathing Zephyrus did softly play,
> A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay
> Hot Titan's beams, which then did glister fair:
> When I, (whom sullen care,
> Through discontent of my long fruitless stay
> In Princes Court, and expectation vain
> Of idle hopes, which still do fly away,
> Like empty shadows, did afflict my brain,)
> Walkt forth to ease my pain

[1] ——Since the winged god his planet clear
Began in me to move, one year is spent:
The which doth longer unto me appear
Than *all those forty* which my life outwent.
Sonnet LX., probably written in 1593 or 1594.

Along the shore of silver-streaming Thames;
Whose rutty bank, the which his river hems,
Was painted all with variable flowers,
And all the meads adorned with dainty gems
Fit to deck maidens' bowers,
And crown their paramours
Against the bridal day, which is not long:
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

* * * * *

At length they all *to merry London came,*
To merry London, my most kindly nurse,
That to me gave this life's first native source,
Though from another place I take my name,
A house of ancient fame.
There, when they came, whereas those bricky towers
The which on Thames broad aged back do ride,
Where now the studious lawyers have their bowers,
There whilome wont the Templar Knights to bide,
Till they decayed through pride:
Next whereunto there stands a stately place,
Where oft I gained gifts and goodly grace [2]
Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell;
Whose want too well now feels my friendless case;
But ah! here fits not well
Old woes, but joys, to tell
Against the bridal day, which is not long:
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song:
Yet therein now doth lodge a noble peer,[3]
Great England's glory and the wide world's wonder,
Whose dreadful name late through all Spain did thunder,
And Hercules two pillars, standing near,
Did make to quake and fear.
Fair branch of honour, flower of chivalry!
That fillest England with thy triumph's fame,
Joy have thou of thy noble victory,[4]
And endless happiness of thine own name
That promiseth the same.

---

[2] Leicester House, then Essex House, in the Strand.
[3] Earl of Essex. [4] At Cadiz, June 21, 1596.

That through thy prowess, and victorious arms,
Thy country may be freed from foreign harms;
And great Elisa's glorious name may ring
Through all the world, filled with thy wide alarms.

Who his father was, and what was his employment we know not. From one of the poems of his later years we learn that his mother bore the famous name of Elizabeth, which was also the cherished one of Spenser's wife.

My love, my life's best ornament,
By whom my spirit out of dust was raised.

But his family, whatever was his father's condition, certainly claimed kindred, though there was a difference in the spelling of the name, with a house then rising into fame and importance, the Spencers of Althorpe, the ancestors of the Spencers and Churchills of modern days. Sir John Spencer had several daughters, three of whom made great marriages. Elizabeth was the wife of Sir George Carey, afterwards the second Lord Hunsdon, the son of Elizabeth's cousin and Counsellor. Anne, first, Lady Compton, afterwards married Thomas Sackville, the son of the poet, Lord Buckhurst, and then Earl of Dorset. Alice, the youngest, whose first husband, Lord Strange, became Earl of Derby, after his death married Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper, Baron Ellesmere, and then Viscount Brackley. These three sisters are celebrated by him in a gallery of the noble ladies of the Court,[6] under poetical names—"Phyllis, the flower of rare perfection," "Charillis, the pride and primrose of the rest," and "Sweet Amaryllis, the youngest but the highest in degree."

[5] *Sonnet* LXXIV.

[6] *Colin Clout's come Home again*, l. 536. Craik, *Spenser*, i. 9. 10.

Alice, Lady Strange, Lady Derby, Lady Ellesmere and Brackley, and then again Dowager Lady Derby, the "Sweet Amaryllis" of the poet, had the rare fortune to be a personal link between Spenser and Milton. She was among the last whom Spenser honoured with his homage: and she was the first whom Milton honoured; for he composed his Arcades to be acted before her by her grandchildren, and the *Masque of Comus* for her son-in-law, Lord Bridgewater, and his daughter, another Lady Alice. With these illustrious sisters Spenser claimed kindred. To each of these he dedicated one of his minor poems; to Lady Strange, the *Tears of the Muses;* to Lady Compton, the Apologue of the Fox and the Ape, *Mother Hubberd's Tale;* to Lady Carey, the Fable of the Butterfly and the Spider, *Muiopotmos.* And in each dedication he assumed on their part the recognition of his claim.

> The sisters three,
> The honour of the noble family,
> Of which I meanest boast myself to be.

Whatever his degree of relationship to them, he could hardly even in the days of his fame have ventured thus publicly to challenge it, unless there had been some acknowledged ground for it. There are obscure indications, which antiquarian diligence may perhaps make clear, which point to East Lancashire as the home of the particular family of Spensers to which Edmund Spenser's father belonged. Probably he was, however, in humble circumstances.

Edmund Spenser was a Londoner by education as well as birth. A recent discovery by Mr. R. B. Knowles, further illustrated by Dr. Grosart,[7] has made us acquainted with

[7] See *The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell*, 1568—1580:

Spenser's school. He was a pupil, probably one of the earliest ones, of the grammar school, then recently (1560) established by the Merchant Taylors' Company, under a famous teacher, Dr. Mulcaster. Among the manuscripts at Townley Hall are preserved the account books of the executors of a bountiful London citizen, Robert Nowell, the brother of Dr. Alexander Nowell, who was Dean of St. Paul's during Elizabeth's reign, and was a leading person in the ecclesiastical affairs of the time. In these books, in a crowd of unknown names of needy relations and dependents, distressed foreigners, and parish paupers, who shared from time to time the liberality of Mr. Robert Nowell's representatives, there appear among the numerous "poor scholars" whom his wealth assisted, the names of Richard Hooker, and Lancelot Andrewes. And there, also, in the roll of the expenditure at Mr. Nowell's pompous funeral at St. Paul's in February, 156$\frac{8}{9}$, among long lists of unknown men and women, high and low, who had mourning given them, among bills for fees to officials, for undertakers' charges, for heraldic pageantry and ornamentation, for abundant supplies for the sumptuous funeral banquet, are put down lists of boys, from the chief London schools, St. Paul's, Westminster, and others, to whom two yards of cloth were to be given to make their gowns: and at the head of the six scholars named from Merchant Taylors' is the name of Edmund Spenser.

He was then, probably, the senior boy of the school, and in the following May he went to Cambridge. The Nowells still helped him: we read in their account books under April 28, 1569, "to Edmond Spensore, scholler of the m'chante tayler scholl, at his gowinge to penbrocke

from the MSS. at Towneley Hall. Edited by Rev. A. B. Grosart. 1877.

hall in chambridge, x^{s}." On the 20th of May, he was admitted sizar, or serving clerk at Pembroke Hall; and on more than one occasion afterwards, like Hooker and like Lancelot Andrewes, also a Merchant Taylors' boy, two or three years Spenser's junior, and a member of the same college, Spenser had a share in the benefactions, small in themselves, but very numerous, with which the Nowells after the fine fashion of the time, were accustomed to assist poor scholars at the Universities. In the visitations of Merchant Taylors' School, at which Grindal, Bishop of London, was frequently present,[8] it is not unlikely that his interest was attracted, in the appositions or examinations, to the promising senior boy of the school. At any rate Spenser, who afterwards celebrated Grindal's qualities as a bishop, was admitted to a place, one which befitted a scholar in humble circumstances, in Grindal's old college. It is perhaps worth noticing that all Spenser's early friends, Grindal, the Nowells, Dr. Mulcaster, his master, were north country men.

Spenser was sixteen or seventeen when he left school for the university, and he entered Cambridge at the time when the struggle which was to occupy the reign of Elizabeth was just opening. At the end of the year 1569, the first distinct blow was struck against the queen and the new settlement of religion, by the Rising of the North. In the first ten years of Elizabeth's reign, Spenser's school time at Merchant Taylors', the great quarrel had slumbered. Events abroad occupied men's minds; the religious wars in France, the death of the Duke of Guise (1563), the loss of Havre, and expulsion of the English garrisons, the close of the Council of Trent (1563), the French peace,

[8] H. B. Wilson, *Hist. of Merchant Taylors' School*, p. 23.

the accession of Pius V. ($156\frac{5}{6}$). Nearer home, there was the marriage of Mary of Scotland with Henry Darnley (1565), and all the tragedy which followed, Kirk of Field (1567), Lochleven, Langside, Carlisle, the imprisonment of the pretender to the English Crown (1568). In England, the authority of Elizabeth had established itself, and the internal organization of the Reformed Church was going on, in an uncertain and tentative way, but steadily. There was a struggle between Genevan exiles, who were for going too fast, and bishops and politicians who were for going too slow; between authority and individual judgment, between home-born state traditions and foreign revolutionary zeal. But outwardly, at least, England had been peaceful. Now however a great change was at hand. In 1566, the Dominican Inquisitor, Michael Ghislieri, was elected Pope, under the title of Pius V.

In Pius (1566-72), were embodied the new spirit and policy of the Roman Church, as they had been created and moulded by the great Jesuit order, and by reforming bishops like Ghiberti of Verona, and Carlo Borromeo of Milan. Devout and self-denying as a saint, fierce and inflexible against abuses as a puritan, resolute and uncompromising as a Jacobin idealist or an Asiatic despot, ruthless and inexorable as an executioner, his soul was bent on re-establishing, not only by preaching and martyrdom, but by the sword and by the stake, the unity of Christendom and of its belief. Eastwards and westwards, he beheld two formidable foes and two serious dangers; and he saw before him the task of his life in the heroic work of crushing English heresy and beating back Turkish misbelief. He broke through the temporizing caution of his predecessors by the Bull of Deposition against Elizabeth in 1570. He was the soul of the con-

federacy which won the day of Lepanto against the Ottomans in 1571. And though dead, his spirit was paramount in the slaughter of St. Bartholomew in 1572.

In the year 1569, while Spenser was passing from school to college, his emissaries were already in England, spreading abroad that Elizabeth was a bastard and an apostate, incapable of filling a Christian throne, which belonged by right to the captive Mary. The seed they sowed bore fruit. In the end of the year, southern England was alarmed by the news of the rebellion of the two great Earls in the north, Percy of Northumberland and Neville of Westmoreland. Durham was sacked and the mass restored by an insurgent host, before which an "aged gentleman," Richard Norton with his sons, bore the banner of the Five Wounds of Christ. The rebellion was easily put down, and the revenge was stern. To the men who had risen at the instigation of the Pope and in the cause of Mary, Elizabeth gave, as she had sworn "such a breakfast as never was in the North before." The hangman finished the work on those who had escaped the sword. Poetry, early and late, has recorded the dreary fate of those brave victims of a mistaken cause, in the ballad of the *Rising of the North*, and in the *White Doe of Rylstone*. It was the signal given for the internecine war which was to follow between Rome and Elizabeth. And it was the first great public event which Spenser would hear of in all men's mouths, as he entered on manhood, the prelude and augury of fierce and dangerous years to come. The nation awoke to the certainty—one which so profoundly affects sentiment and character both in a nation and in an individual—that among the habitual and fixed conditions of life is that of having a serious and implacable enemy ever to reckon with.

And in this year, apparently in the transition time between school and college, Spenser's literary ventures began. The evidence is curious, but it seems to be clear. In 1569, a refugee Flemish physician from Antwerp, who had fled to England from the "abominations of the Roman Antichrist" and the persecutions of the Duke of Alva, John Vander Noodt, published one of those odd miscellanies, fashionable at the time, half moral and poetical, half fiercely polemical, which he called a "*Theatre*, wherein be represented as well the Miseries and Calamities which follow the voluptuous Worldlings, as also the great Joys and Pleasures which the Faithful do enjoy—an argument both profitable and delectable to all that sincerely love the word of God." This "little treatise," was a mixture of verse and prose, setting forth in general, the vanity of the world, and, in particular, predictions of the ruin of Rome and Antichrist: and it enforced its lessons by illustrative woodcuts. In this strange jumble are preserved, we can scarcely doubt, the first compositions which we know of Spenser's. Among the pieces are some Sonnets of Petrarch, and some Visions of the French poet Joachim du Bellay, whose poems were published in 1568. In the collection itself, these pieces are said by the compiler to have been translated by him "out of the Brabants speech," and "out of Dutch into English." But in a volume of "poems of the world's vanity," and published years afterwards in 1591, ascribed to Spenser, and put together, apparently with his consent, by his publisher, are found these very pieces from Petrarch and Du Bellay. The translations from Petrarch are almost literally the same, and are said to have been "formerly translated." In the Visions of Du Bellay there is this difference, that the earlier translations are in

blank verse, and the later ones are rimed as sonnets; but the change does not destroy the manifest identity of the two translations. So that unless Spenser's publisher, to whom the poet had certainly given some of his genuine pieces for the volume, is not to be trusted,—which, of course, is possible, but not probable—or unless,—what is in the last degree inconceivable,—Spenser had afterwards been willing to take the trouble of turning the blank verse of Du Bellay's unknown translator into rime, the Dutchman who dates his *Theatre of Worldlings* on the 25th May, 1569, must have employed the promising and fluent school boy, to furnish him with an English versified form, of which he himself took the credit, for compositions which he professes to have known only in the Brabants or Dutch translations. The sonnets from Petrarch are translated with much command of language; there occurs in them, what was afterwards a favourite thought of Spenser's:—

> —The Nymphs,
> That sweetly in accord did *tune their voice*
> *To the soft sounding of the waters' fall.*[9]

It is scarcely credible that the translator of the sonnets could have caught so much as he has done of the spirit of Petrarch without having been able to read the Italian original; and if Spenser was the translator, it is a curious illustration of the fashionableness of Italian literature in the days of Elizabeth, that a school-boy just leaving Merchant Taylors' should have been so much interested in it. Dr. Mulcaster, his master, is said by Warton to have given special attention to the teaching of the English language.

If these translations were Spenser's, he must have

[9] Comp. *Sheph. Cal.* April l. 36. June l. 8. F. Q. 6. 10. 7.

gone to Cambridge with a faculty of verse, which for his time may be compared to that with which winners of prize poems go to the universities now. But there was this difference, that the school-boy versifiers of our days are rich with the accumulated experience and practice of the most varied and magnificent poetical literature in the world; while Spenser had but one really great English model behind him; and Chaucer, honoured as he was, had become in Elizabeth's time, if not obsolete, yet in his diction, very far removed from the living language of the day. Even Milton, in his boyish compositions, wrote after Spenser and Shakespere, with their contemporaries, had created modern English poetry. Whatever there was in Spenser's early verses of grace and music was of his own finding: no one of his own time, except in occasional and fitful snatches, like stanzas of Sackville's, had shown him the way. Thus equipped, he entered the student world, then full of pedantic and ill-applied learning, of the disputations of Calvinistic theology, and of the beginnings of those highly speculative puritanical controversies, which were the echo at the University of the great political struggles of the day, and were soon to become so seriously practical. The University was represented to the authorities in London as being in a state of dangerous excitement, troublesome and mutinous. Whitgift, afterwards Elizabeth's favourite archbishop, Master, first of Pembroke, and then of Trinity, was Vice-Chancellor of the University; but as the guardian of established order, he found it difficult to keep in check the violent and revolutionary spirit of the theological schools. Calvin was beginning to be set up there as the infallible doctor of Protestant theology. Cartwright from the Margaret Professor's chair was teach-

ing the exclusive and divine claims of the Geneva platform of discipline, and in defiance of the bishops and the government was denouncing the received Church polity and ritual as Popish and anti-Christian. Cartwright, an extreme and uncompromising man, was deprived in 1570; but the course which things were taking under the influence of Rome and Spain gave force to his lessons and warnings, and strengthened his party. In this turmoil of opinions, amid these hard and technical debates, these fierce conflicts between the highest authorities, and this unsparing violence and bitterness of party recriminations, Spenser, with the tastes and faculties of a poet, and the love not only of what was beautiful, but of what was meditative and dreamy, began his university life.

It was not a favourable atmosphere for the nurture of a great poet. But it suited one side of Spenser's mind, as it suited that of all but the most independent Englishmen of the time, Shakespere, Bacon, Ralegh. Little is known of Spenser's Cambridge career. It is probable, from the persons with whom he was connected, that he would not be indifferent to the debates around him, and that his religious prepossessions were then, as afterwards, in favour of the conforming puritanism in the Church, as opposed to the extreme and thorough-going puritanism of Cartwright. Of the conforming puritans, who would have been glad of a greater approximation to the Swiss model, but who, whatever their private wishes or dislikes, thought it best, for good reasons or bad, to submit to the strong determination of the government against it, and to accept what the government approved and imposed, Grindal, who held successively the great sees of London, York, and Canterbury, and Nowell, Dean of St. Paul's, Spenser's benefactor, were representative types. Grindal, a waverer like many others

in opinion, had also a noble and manly side to his character, in his hatred of practical abuses, and in the courageous and obstinate resistance which he could offer to power, when his sense of right was outraged. Grindal, as has been said, was perhaps instrumental in getting Spenser into his own old college, Pembroke Hall, with the intention, it may be, as was the fashion of bishops of that time, of becoming his patron. But certainly after his disgrace in 1577, and when it was not quite safe to praise a great man under the displeasure of the Court, Grindal is the person whom Spenser first singled out for his warmest and heartiest praise. He is introduced under a thin disguise, "Algrind," in Spenser's earliest work after he left Cambridge, the *Shepherd's Calendar*, as the pattern of the true and faithful Christian pastor. And if Pembroke Hall retained at all the tone and tendencies of such masters as Ridley, Grindal, and Whitgift, the school in which Spenser grew up was one of their mitigated puritanism. But his puritanism was political and national, rather than religious. He went heartily with the puritan party in their intense hatred of Rome and Roman partisans; he went with them also in their denunciations of the scandals and abuses of the ecclesiastical government at home. But in temper of mind and intellectual bias he had little in common with the puritans. For the stern austerities of Calvinism, its fierce and eager scholasticism, its isolation from human history, human enjoyment, and all the manifold play and variety of human character, there could not be much sympathy in a man like Spenser, with his easy and flexible nature, keenly alive to all beauty, an admirer even when he was not a lover of the alluring pleasures of which the world is full, with a perpetual struggle going on in him, between his strong instincts of purity and

right, and his passionate appreciation of every charm and grace. He shows no signs of agreement with the internal characteristics of the puritans, their distinguishing theology, their peculiarities of thought and habits, their protests, right or wrong, against the fashions and amusements of the world. If not a man of pleasure, he yet threw himself without scruple into the tastes, the language, the pursuits, of the gay and gallant society in which they saw so much evil: and from their narrow view of life, and the contempt, dislike, and fear, with which they regarded the whole field of human interest, he certainly was parted by the widest gulf. Indeed, he had not the sternness and concentration of purpose, which made Milton the great puritan poet.

Spenser took his Master's degree in 1576, and then left Cambridge. He gained no Fellowship, and there is nothing to show how he employed himself. His classical learning, whether acquired there or elsewhere, was copious, but curiously inaccurate; and the only specimen remaining of his Latin composition in verse is contemptible in its mediæval clumsiness. We know nothing of his Cambridge life except the friendships which he formed there. An intimacy began at Cambridge of the closest and most affectionate kind, which lasted long into after-life, between him and two men of his college, one older in standing than himself, the other younger; Gabriel Harvey, first a fellow of Pembroke, and then a student or teacher of civil law at Trinity Hall, and Edward Kirke, like Spenser, a sizar at Pembroke, recently identified with the E. K., who was the editor and commentator of Spenser's earliest work, the anonymous *Shepherd's Calendar*. Of the younger friend this is the most that is known. That he was deeply in Spenser's con-

fidence as a literary coadjutor, and possibly in other ways, is shown in the work which he did. But Gabriel Harvey was a man who had influence on Spenser's ideas and purposes, and on the direction of his efforts. He was a classical scholar of much distinction in his day, well read in the Italian authors then so fashionable, and regarded as a high authority on questions of criticism and taste. Except to students of Elizabethan literary history, he has become an utterly obscure personage; and he has not usually been spoken of with much respect. He had the misfortune, later in life, to plunge violently into the scurrilous quarrels of the day, and as he was matched with wittier and more popular antagonists, he has come down to us as a foolish pretender, or at least as a dull and stupid scholar who knew little of the real value of the books he was always ready to quote, like the pedant of the comedies, or Shakespere's schoolmaster Holofernes. Further, he was one who, with his classical learning, had little belief in the resources of his mother tongue, and he was one of the earliest and most confident supporters of a plan then fashionable, for reforming English verse, by casting away its natural habits and rhythms, and imposing on it the laws of the classical metres. In this he was not singular. The professed treatises of this time on poetry, of which there were several, assume the same theory, as the mode of "reforming" and duly elevating English verse. It was eagerly accepted by Philip Sidney and his Areopagus of wits at court, who busied themselves in devising rules of their own—improvements as they thought on those of the university men—for English hexameters and sapphics, or as they called it, artificial versifying. They regarded the comparative value of the native English rhythms and the classical metres, much as our ancestors of Addison's

day regarded the comparison between Gothic and Palladian architecture. One, even if it sometimes had a certain romantic interest, was rude and coarse; the other was the perfection of polite art and good taste. Certainly in what remains of Gabriel Harvey's writing, there is much that seems to us vain and ridiculous enough; and it has been naturally surmised that he must have been a dangerous friend and counsellor to Spenser. But probably we are hard upon him. His writings, after all, are not much more affected and absurd in their outward fashion than most of the literary composition of the time; his verses are no worse than those of most of his neighbours; he was not above, but he was not below, the false taste and clumsiness of his age; and the rage for "artificial versifying" was for the moment in the air. And it must be said, that though his enthusiasm for English hexameters is of a piece with the puritan use of scripture texts in divinity and morals, yet there is no want of hard-headed shrewdness in his remarks; indeed, in his rules for the adaptation of English words and accents to classical metres, he shows clearness and good sense in apprehending the conditions of the problem, while Sidney and Spenser still appear confused and uncertain. But in spite of his pedantry, and though he had not, as we shall see, the eye to discern at first the genius of the *Faery Queen*, he has to us the interest of having been Spenser's first, and as far as we can see, to the last, dearest friend. By both of his younger fellow-students at Cambridge, he was looked up to with the deepest reverence, and the most confiding affection. Their language is extravagant, but there is no reason to think that it was not genuine. E. Kirke, the editor of Spenser's first venture, the *Shepherd's Calendar*, commends the "new poet" to his patronage, and to the protection

of his "mighty rhetoric," and exhorts Harvey himself to seize the poetical "garland which to him alone is due." Spenser speaks in the same terms; "*veruntamen te sequor solum; nunquam vero assequar.*" Portions of the early correspondence between Harvey and Spenser have been preserved to us, possibly by Gabriel Harvey's self-satisfaction in regard to his own compositions. But with the pedagogue's jocoseness, and a playfulness which is like that of an elephant, it shows on both sides easy frankness, sincerity, and warmth, and not a little of the early character of the younger man. In Spenser's earliest poetry, his pastorals, Harvey appears among the imaginary rustics, as the poet's "special and most familiar friend," under the name of Hobbinol,—

"Good Hobbinol, that was so true."

To him Spenser addresses his confidences, under the name of Colin Clout, a name borrowed from Skelton, a satirical poet of Henry VIII.'s time, which Spenser kept throughout his poetical career. Harvey reappears in one of Spenser's latest writings, a return to the early pastoral, *Colin Clout's come home again*, a picture drawn in distant Ireland, of the brilliant but disappointing court of Elizabeth. And from Ireland in 1586, was addressed to Harvey by "his devoted friend during life," the following fine sonnet, which, whatever may have been the merit of Harvey's criticisms and his literary quarrels with Greene and Nash, shows at least Spenser's unabated honour for him.

TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL, MY SINGULAR GOOD FRIEND, M. GABRIEL HARVEY, DOCTOR OF THE LAWS.

HARVEY, the happy above happiest men
I read; that, sitting like a looker on
Of this world's stage, dost note with critic pen
The sharp dislikes of each condition;

And, as one careless of suspicion,
Ne fawnest for the favour of the great;
Ne fearest foolish reprehension
Of faulty men, which danger to thee threat;
But freely dost, of what thee list, entreat,
Like a great lord of peerless liberty;
Lifting the good up to high honour's seat,
And the evil damning ever more to die;
For life and death is in thy doomful writing;
So thy renown lives ever by enditing.

Dublin, this xviii. of July, 1586. Your devoted friend, during life,
EDMUND SPENSER.

Between Cambridge and Spenser's appearance in London, there is a short but obscure interval. What is certain is, that he spent part of it in the North of England; that he was busy with various poetical works, one of which was soon to make him known as a new star in the poetical heaven; and lastly, that in the effect on him of a deep but unrequited passion, he then received what seems to have been a strong and determining influence on his character and life. It seems likely that his sojourn in the north, which perhaps first introduced the London-bred scholar, the "Southern Shepherd's Boy," to the novel and rougher country life of distant Lancashire, also gave form and local character to his first considerable work. But we do not know for certain where his abode was in the north; of his literary activity, which must have been considerable, we only partially know the fruit; and of the lady whom he made so famous, that her name became a consecrated word in the poetry of the time, of Rosalind, the "Widow's Daughter of the Glen," whose refusal of his suit, and preference for another, he lamented so bitterly, yet would allow no one else to blame, we know absolutely nothing. She would not be his wife; but apparently, he never ceased to love her through all the chances and temptations, and possibly errors of his life, even apparently in

the midst of his passionate admiration of the lady whom, long afterwards, he did marry. To her kindred and condition, various clues have been suggested, only to provoke and disappoint us. Whatever her condition, she was able to measure Spenser's powers: Gabriel Harvey has preserved one of her compliments—"Gentle Mistress Rosalind once reported him to have all the intelligences at commandment; and at another, christened him her *Signior Pegaso*." But the unknown Rosalind had given an impulse to the young poet's powers, and a colour to his thoughts, and had enrolled Spenser in that band and order of poets,—with one exception, not the greatest order,—to whom the wonderful passion of love, in its heights and its depths, is the element on which their imagination works, and out of which it moulds its most beautiful and characteristic creations.

But in October, 1579, he emerges from obscurity. If we may trust the correspondence between Gabriel Harvey and Spenser, which was published at the time, Spenser was then in London.[1] It was the time of the crisis of the Alençon courtship, while the Queen was playing fast and loose with her Valois lover, whom she playfully called her frog; when all about her, Burghley, Leicester, Sidney, and Walsingham, were dismayed, both at the plan itself, and at her vacillations; and just when the Puritan pamphleteer, who had given expression to the popular disgust at a French marriage, especially at a connexion with the family which had on its hands the blood of St. Bartholomew, was sentenced to lose his right hand as a seditious

[1] Published in June, 1580. Reprinted incompletely in Haslewood, *Ancient Critical Essays* (1815), ii. 255. Extracts given in editions of Spenser by Hughes, Todd, and Morris. The letters are of April, 1579, and October, 1580.

libeller. Spenser had become acquainted with Philip Sidney, and Sidney's literary and courtly friends. He had been received into the household of Sidney's uncle, Lord Leicester, and dates one of his letters from Leicester House. Among his employments he had written, "*Stemmata Dudleiana.*" He is doubting whether or not to publish, "to utter," some of his poetical compositions: he is doubting, and asks Harvey's advice, whether or not to dedicate them to His Excellent Lordship, "lest by our much cloying their noble ears he should gather contempt of myself, or else seem rather for gain and commodity to do it, and some sweetness that I have already tasted." Yet, he thinks, that when occasion is so fairly offered of estimation and preferment, it may be well to use it: "while the iron is hot, it is good striking; and minds of nobles vary, as their estates." And he was on the eve of starting across the sea to be employed in Leicester's service, on some permanent mission in France, perhaps in connexion with the Alençon intrigues. He was thus launched into what was looked upon as the road of preferment; in his case, as it turned out, a very subordinate form of public employment, which was to continue almost for his lifetime. Sidney had recognized his unusual power, if not yet his genius. He brought him forward; perhaps he accepted him as a friend. Tradition makes him Sidney's companion at Penshurst; in his early poems, Kent is the county with which he seems most familiar. But Sidney certainly made him known to the queen; he probably recommended him as a promising servant to Leicester: and he impressed his own noble and beautiful character deeply on Spenser's mind. Spenser saw and learned in him what was then the highest type of the finished gentleman. He led Spenser astray. Sidney was not

without his full share of that affectation, which was then thought refinement. Like Gabriel Harvey, he induced Spenser to waste his time on the artificial versifying which was in vogue. But such faults and mistakes of fashion, and in one shape or another they are inevitable in all ages, were as nothing, compared to the influence on a highly receptive nature, of a character so elevated and pure, so genial, so brave and true. It was not in vain that Spenser was thus brought so near to his "Astrophel."

These letters tell us all that we know of Spenser's life at this time. During these anxious eighteen months, and connected with persons like Sidney and Leicester, Spenser only writes to Harvey on literary subjects. He is discreet, and will not indulge Harvey's "desire to hear of my late being with her Majesty." According to a literary fashion of the time, he writes and is addressed as *M. Immerito*, and the great business which occupies him and fills the letters is the scheme devised in Sidney's *Areopagus* for the "general surceasing and silence of bald Rymers, and also of the very best of them too; and for prescribing certain laws and rules of quantities of English syllables for English verse." Spenser "is more in love with his English versifying than with ryming,"—"which," he says to Harvey, "I should have done long since, if I would then have followed your counsel." Harvey, of course, is delighted; he thanks the good angel which puts it into the heads of Sidney and Edward Dyer, "the two very diamonds of her Majesty's court," "our very Castor and Pollux," to "help forward our new famous enterprise for the exchanging of barbarous rymes for artificial verses;" and the whole subject is discussed at great length between the two friends; "Mr. Drant's" rules are compared with those of "Mr. Sidney," revised by "Mr. Immerito;" and

examples, highly illustrative of the character of the "famous enterprise" are copiously given. In one of Harvey's letters we have a curious account of changes of fashion in studies and ideas at Cambridge. They seem to have changed since Spenser's time.

I beseech you all this while, what news at *Cambridge*. *Tully* and *Demosthenes* nothing so much studied as they were wont: *Livy* and *Sallust* perhaps more, rather than less: *Lucian* never so much: *Aristotle* much named but little read: *Xenophon* and *Plato* reckoned amongst discoursers, and conceited superficial fellows; much verbal and sophistical jangling; little subtle and effectual disputing. *Machiavel* a great man: *Castilio*, of no small repute: *Petrarch* and *Boccace* in every man's mouth: *Galateo* and *Guazzo* never so happy: but some acquainted with *Unico Aretino*: the *French* and *Italian* highly regarded: the *Latin* and *Greek* but lightly. The *Queen Mother* at the beginning or end of every conference: all inquisitive after news: new *books*, new fashions, new laws, new officers, and some after new elements, some after new heavens and hells too. *Turkish* affairs familiarly known: castles built in the air: much ado, and little help: in no age so little so much made of; every one highly in his own favour. Something made of nothing, in spight of Nature: numbers made of cyphers, in spight of Art. Oxen and asses, notwithstanding the absurdity it seemed to *Plautus*, drawing in the same yoke: the Gospel taught, not learnt; Charity cold; nothing good, but by imputation; the Ceremonial Law in word abrogated, the Judicial in effect disannull'd, the Moral abandon'd; *the Light, the Light* in every man's lips, but mark their eyes, and you will say they are rather like owls than eagles. As of old books, so of ancient virtue, honesty, fidelity, equity, new abridgments; every day spawns new opinions: heresy in divinity, in philosophy, in humanity, in manners, grounded upon hearsay; doctors contemn'd; the *devil* not so hated as the *pope*; many invectives, but no amendment. No more ado about caps and surplices; Mr. *Cartwright* quite forgotten.

* * * * *

David, Ulysses, and *Solon,* feign'd themselves fools and madmen; our fools and madmen feign themselves *Davids, Ulysses's,* and *Solons.* It is pity fair weather should do any hurt; but I know what peace and quietness hath done with some melancholy pickstraws.

The letters preserve a good many touches of character which are interesting. This, for instance, which shows Spenser's feeling about Sidney. "New books," writes Spenser, "I hear of none, but only of one, that writing a certain book called *The School of Abuse,* [Stephen Gosson's *Invective against poets, pipers, players, &c.*] and dedicating to M. Sidney, was for his labour scorned: *if at least it be in the goodness of that nature to scorn.*" As regards Spenser himself, it is clear from the letters that Harvey was not without uneasiness lest his friend, from his gay and pleasure-loving nature, and the temptations round him, should be carried away into the vices of an age, which, though very brilliant and high-tempered, was also a very dissolute one. He couches his counsels mainly in Latin; but they point to real danger; and he adds in English,—"Credit me, I will never lin [=cease] baiting at you, till I have rid you quite of this yonkerly and womanly humour." But in the second pair of letters of April, 1580, a lady appears. Whether Spenser was her husband or her lover, we know not; but she is his "sweetheart." The two friends write of her in Latin. Spenser sends in Latin the saucy messages of his sweetheart, "meum corculum," to Harvey; Harvey, with academic gallantry, sends her in Latin as many thanks for her charming letter as she has hairs, "half golden, half silver, half jewelled, in her little head;"—she is a second little Rosalind—"altera Rosalindula," whom he salutes as "Domina Immerito, mea bellissima Colina Clouta." But

whether wife or mistress, we hear of her no more. Further, the letters contain notices of various early works of Spenser. The "new" *Shepherd's Calendar*, of which more will be said, had just been published. And in this correspondence of April, 1580, we have the first mention of the *Faery Queen*. The compositions here mentioned have been either lost, or worked into his later poetry; his *Dreams*, *Epithalamion Thamesis*, apparently in the "reformed verse," his *Dying Pelican*, his *Slumber*, his *Stemmata Dudleiana*, his *Comedies*. They show at least the activity and eagerness of the writer in his absorbing pursuit. But he was still in bondage to the belief that English poetry ought to try to put on a classical dress. It is strange that the man who had written some of the poetry in the *Shepherd's Calendar* should have found either satisfaction or promise in the following attempt at Trimeter Iambics.

And nowe requite I you with the like, not with the verye beste, but with the verye shortest, namely, with a few Iambickes: I dare warrant they be precisely perfect for the feete (as you can easily judge), and varie not one inch from the Rule. I will imparte yours to Maister *Sidney* and Maister *Dyer* at my nexte going to the Courte. I praye you, keepe mine close to your selfe, or your verie entire friends, Maister *Preston*, Maister *Still*, and the reste.

Iambicum Trimetrum.

Unhappie Verse, the witnesse of my unhappie state,
Make thy selfe fluttring wings of thy fast flying
Thought, and fly forth unto my Love wheresoever she be:

Whether lying reastlesse in heavy bedde, or else
Sitting so cheerlesse at the cheerfull boorde, or else
Playing alone carelesse on hir heavenlie Virginals.

If in Bed, tell hir, that my eyes can take no reste:
If at Boorde, tell hir that my mouth can eate no meate:
If at hir Virginals, tell hir, I can heare no mirth.

Asked why? say: Waking Love suffereth no sleepe:
Say, that raging Love dothe appall the weake stomacke:
Say, that lamenting Love marreth the Musicall.

Tell hir, that hir pleasures were wonte to lull me asleepe:
Tell hir, that hir beautie was wonte to feede mine eyes:
Tell hir, that hir sweete Tongue was wonte to make me mirth.

Nowe doe I nightly waste, wanting my kindely reste:
Nowe doe I dayly starve, wanting my lively foode:
Nowe doe I alwayes dye, wanting thy timely mirth.

And if I waste, who will bewaile my heavy chaunce?
And if I starve, who will record my cursed end?
And if I dye, who will saye: *this was Immerito?*

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW POET—THE SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR.

[1579.]

It is clear that when Spenser appeared in London, he had found out his powers and vocation as a poet. He came from Cambridge, fully conscious of the powerful attraction of the imaginative faculties, conscious of an extraordinary command over the resources of language, and with a singular gift of sensitiveness to the grace and majesty and suggestiveness of sound and rhythm, such as makes a musician. And whether he knew it or not, his mind was in reality made up, as to what his English poetry was to be. In spite of opinions and fashions round him, in spite of university pedantry and the affectations of the court, in spite of Harvey's classical enthusiasm, and Sidney's Areopagus, and in spite of half-fancying himself converted to their views, his own powers and impulses showed him the truth, and made him understand better than his theories what a poet could and ought to do with English speech in its free play and genuine melodies. When we first come upon him, we find that at the age of twenty-seven, he had not only realized an idea of English poetry far in advance of anything which his age had yet conceived or seen; but that, besides what he had executed or planned, he had already in his mind the outlines of

the *Faery Queen*, and, in some form or other, though perhaps not yet as we have it, had written some portion of it.

In attempting to revive for his own age Chaucer's suspended art, Spenser had the tendencies of the time with him. The age was looking out for some one to do for England what had been grandly done for Italy. The time in truth was full of poetry. The nation was just in that condition which is most favourable to an outburst of poetical life or art. It was highly excited; but it was also in a state of comparative peace and freedom from external disturbance. "An over-faint quietness," writes Sidney in 1581, lamenting that there were so few good poets, "should seem to strew the house for poets." After the first ten years of Elizabeth's reign, and the establishment of her authority, the country had begun to breathe freely, and fall into natural and regular ways. During the first half of the century, it had had before it the most astonishing changes which the world had seen for centuries. These changes seemed definitely to have run their course; with the convulsions which accompanied them, their uprootings and terrors, they were gone; and the world had become accustomed to their results. The nation still had before it great events, great issues, great perils, great and indefinite prospects of adventure and achievement. The old quarrels and animosities of Europe had altered in character: from being wars between princes, and disputes of personal ambition, they had attracted into them all that interests and divides mankind, from high to low. Their animating principle was a high and a sacred cause: they had become wars of liberty, and wars of religion. The world had settled down to the fixed antipathies and steady rivalries of centuries to come. But

the mere shock of transition was over. Yet the remembrance of the great break-up was still fresh. For fifty years the English people had had before its eyes the great vicissitudes which make tragedy. They had seen the most unforeseen and most unexpected revolutions in what had for ages been held certain and immovable; the overthrow of the strongest institutions, and most venerable authorities; the violent shifting of feelings from faith to passionate rejection, from reverence to scorn and a hate which could not be satisfied. They had seen the strangest turns of fortune, the most wonderful elevations to power, the most terrible visitations of disgrace. They had seen the mightiest ruined, the brightest and most admired brought down to shame and death, men struck down with all the forms of law, whom the age honoured as its noblest ornaments. They had seen the flames of martyr or heretic, heads which had worn a crown laid one after another on the block, controversies, not merely between rivals for power, but between the deepest principles and the most rooted creeds, settled on the scaffold. Such a time of surprise,—of hope and anxiety, of horror and anguish to-day, of relief and exultation to-morrow,—had hardly been to England as the first half of the sixteenth century. All that could stir men's souls, all that could inflame their hearts, or that could wring them, had happened.

And yet, compared with previous centuries, and with what was going on abroad, the time now was a time of peace, and men lived securely. Wealth was increasing. The Wars of the Roses had left the crown powerful to enforce order, and protect industry and trade. The nation was beginning to grow rich. When the day's work was done, men's leisure was not disturbed by

the events of neighbouring war. They had time to open their imaginations to the great spectacle which had been unrolled before them, to reflect upon it, to put into shape their thoughts about it. The intellectual movement of the time had reached England, and its strong impulse to mental efforts in new and untried directions was acting powerfully upon Englishmen. But though there was order and present peace at home, there was much to keep men's minds on the stretch. There was quite enough danger and uncertainty to wind up their feelings to a high pitch. But danger was not so pressing as to prevent them from giving full place to the impressions of the strange and eventful scene round them, with its grandeur, its sadness, its promises. In such a state of things there is everything to tempt poetry. There are its materials and its stimulus, and there is the leisure to use its materials.

But the poet had not yet been found; and everything connected with poetry was in the disorder of ignorance and uncertainty. Between the counsels of a pedantic scholarship, and the rude and hesitating, but true instincts of the natural English ear, every one was at sea. Yet it seemed as if every one was trying his hand at verse. Popular writing took that shape. The curious and unique record of literature preserved in the registers of the Stationers' Company, shows that the greater proportion of what was published, or at least entered for publication, was in the shape of ballads. The ballad vied with the sermon in doing what the modern newspaper does, in satisfying the public craving for information, amusement, or guidance. It related the last great novelty, the last great battle or crime, a storm or monstrous birth. It told some pathetic or burlesque story, or it moralized on the

humours or follies of classes and professions, of young and old, of men and of women. It sang the lover's hopes or sorrows, or the adventures of some hero of history or romance. It might be a fable, a satire, a libel, a squib, a sacred song or paraphrase, a homily. But about all that it treated it sought to throw more or less the colour of imagination. It appealed to the reader's feelings, or sympathy, or passion. It attempted to raise its subject above the level of mere matter of fact. It sought for choice and expressive words; it called in the help of measure and rhythm. It aimed at a rude form of art. Presently the critical faculty came into play. Scholars, acquainted with classical models and classical rules, began to exercise their judgment on their own poetry, to construct theories, to review the performances before them, to suggest plans for the improvement of the poetic art. Their essays are curious, as the beginnings of that great critical literature, which in England, in spite of much infelicity, has only been second to the poetry which it judged. But in themselves they are crude, meagre, and helpless; interesting mainly, as showing how much craving there was for poetry, and how little good poetry to satisfy it, and what inconceivable doggrel could be recommended by reasonable men, as fit to be admired and imitated. There is fire and eloquence in Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (1581); but his ideas about poetry were floating, loose, and ill defined, and he had not much to point to as of first-rate excellence in recent writers. Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), and the more elaborate work ascribed to George Puttenham (1589), works of tame and artificial learning without Sidney's fire, reveal equally the poverty, as a whole, of what had been as yet produced in England as poetry, in spite of the wide-

spread passion for poetry. The specimens which they quote and praise are mostly grotesque to the last degree. Webbe improves some gracefully flowing lines of Spenser's into the most portentous Sapphics; and Puttenham squeezes compositions into the shapes of triangles, eggs, and pilasters. Gabriel Harvey is accused by his tormentor, Nash, of doing the same, "of having writ verse in all kinds, as in form of a pair of gloves, a dozen of points, a pair of spectacles, a two-hand sword, a poynado, a colossus, a pyramid, a painter's easel, a market cross, a trumpet, an anchor, a pair of pot-hooks." Puttenham's Art of Poetry, with its books, one on Proportion, the other on Ornament, might be compared to an Art of War, of which one book treated of barrack drill, and the other of busbies, sabretasches, and different forms of epaulettes and feathers. These writers do not want good sense or the power to make a good remark. But the stuff and material for good criticism, the strong and deep poetry, which makes such criticisms as theirs seem so absurd, had not yet appeared.

A change was at hand; and the suddenness of it is one of the most astonishing things in literary history. The ten years from 1580 to 1590 present a set of critical essays, giving a picture of English poetry of which, though there are gleams of a better hope, and praise is specially bestowed on a "new poet," the general character is feebleness, fantastic absurdity, affectation and bad taste. Force, and passion, and simple truth, and powerful thoughts of the world and man, are rare; and poetical reformers appear maundering about miserable attempts at English hexameters and sapphics. What was to be looked for from all that? Who could suppose what was preparing under it all? But the dawn was

come. The next ten years, from 1590 to 1600, not only saw the *Faery Queen*, but they were the years of the birth of the English Drama. Compare the idea which we get of English poetry from Philip Sidney's Defense in 1581, and Puttenham's treatise in 1589, I do not say with Shakespere, but with Lamb's selections from the Dramatic Poets, many of them unknown names to the majority of modern readers; and we see at once what a bound English poetry has made; we see that a new spring time of power and purpose in poetical thought has opened; new and original forms have sprung to life of poetical grandeur, seriousness, and magnificence. From the poor and rude play-houses, with their troops of actors most of them profligate and disreputable, their coarse excitements, their buffoonery, license, and taste for the monstrous and horrible,—denounced not without reason as corruptors of public morals, preached against at Paul's Cross, expelled the city by the Corporation, classed by the law with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars, and patronized by the great and unscrupulous nobles in defiance of it—there burst forth suddenly a new poetry, which with its reality, depth, sweetness and nobleness took the world captive. The poetical ideas and aspirations of the Englishmen of the time had found at last adequate interpreters, and their own national and unrivalled expression.

And in this great movement Spenser was the harbinger and announcing sign. But he was only the harbinger. What he did was to reveal to English ears as it never had been revealed before, at least, since the days of Chaucer, the sweet music, the refined grace, the inexhaustible versatility of the English tongue. But his own efforts were in a different direction from that profound and insatiable seek-

ing after the real, in thought and character, in representation and expression, which made Shakespere so great, and his brethren great in proportion as they approached him. Spenser's genius continued to the end under the influences which were so powerful when it first unfolded itself. To the last it allied itself, in form, at least, with the artificial. To the last it moved in a world which was not real, which never had existed, which, any how, was only a world of memory and sentiment. He never threw himself frankly on human life as it is; he always viewed it through a veil of mist which greatly altered its true colours, and often distorted its proportions. And thus while more than any one he prepared the instruments and the path for the great triumph, he himself missed the true field for the highest exercise of poetic power; he missed the highest honours of that in which he led the way.

Yet, curiously enough, it seems as if, early in his career, he was affected by the strong stream which drew Shakespere. Among the compositions of his first period, besides *The Shepherd's Calendar*, are *Nine Comedies*,—clearly real plays, which his friend Gabriel Harvey praised with enthusiasm. As early as 1579 Spenser had laid before Gabriel Harvey for his judgement and advice, a portion of the *Fairy Queen* in some shape or another, and these nine comedies. He was standing at the parting of the ways. The allegory, with all its tempting associations and machinery, with its ingenuities and pictures, and boundless license to vagueness and to fancy, was on one side; and on the other, the drama, with its *prima facie* and superficially prosaic aspects, and its kinship to what was customary and commonplace and unromantic in human life. Of the nine comedies, composed on the model of those of Ariosto

and Machiavelli and other Italians, every trace has perished. But this was Gabriel Harvey's opinion of the respective value of the two specimens of work submitted to him, and this was his counsel to their author. In April, 1580, he thus writes to Spenser.

In good faith I had once again nigh forgotten your *Faerie Queene;* howbeit, by good chance, I have now sent her home at the last neither in better or worse case than I found her. And must you of necessity have my judgement of her indeed? To be plain, I am void of all judgement, if your *Nine Comedies*, whereunto in imitation of Herodotus, you give the names of the Nine Muses (and in one man's fancy not unworthily), come not nearer Ariosto's comedies, either for the fineness of plausible elocution, or the rareness of poetical invention, than that *Elvish Queen* doth to his *Orlando Furioso*, which notwithstanding you will needs seem to emulate, and hope to overgo, as you flatly professed yourself in one of your last letters.

Besides that you know, it hath been the usual practice of the most exquisite and odd wits in all nations, and specially in Italy rather to show, and advance themselves that way than any other: as, namely, those three notorious discoursing heads, Bibiena, Machiavel, and Aretino did (to let Bembo and Ariosto pass) with the great admiration and wonderment of the whole country: being indeed reputed matchable in all points, both for conceit of wit and eloquent deciphering of matters, either with Aristophanes and Menander in Greek, or with Plautus and Terence in Latin, or with any other in any other tongue. But I will not stand greatly with you in your own matters. If so be the *Faery Queene* be fairer in your eye than the Nine Muses, and Hobgoblin run away with the garland from Apollo: mark what I say, and yet I will not say that I thought, but there is an end for this once, and fare you well, till God or some good angel put you in a better mind.

It is plain on which side Spenser's own judgement inclined. He had probably written the comedies, as he had written English hexameters, out of deference to

others, or to try his hand. But the current of his own secret thoughts, those thoughts, with their ideals and aims, which tell a man what he is made for, and where his power lies, set another way. The *Fairy Queen was* 'fairer in his eye than the Nine Muses, and Hobgoblin did run away with the garland from Apollo.' What Gabriel Harvey prayed for as the 'better mind' did not come. And we cannot repine at a decision which gave us, in the shape which it took at last, the allegory of the *Fairy Queen*.

But the *Fairy Queen*, though already planned and perhaps begun, belongs to the last ten years of the century, to the season of fulfilment not of promise, to the blossoming, not to the opening bud. The new hopes for poetry which Spenser brought were given in a work, which the *Fairy Queen* has eclipsed and almost obscured, as the sun puts out the morning star. Yet that which marked a turning-point in the history of our poetry, was the book which came out, timidly and anonymously, in the end of 1579, or the beginning of 1580, under the borrowed title of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, a name familiar in those days as that of an early medley of astrology and homely receipts from time to time reprinted, which was the Moore's or Zadkiel's almanac of the time. It was not published ostensibly by Spenser himself, though it is inscribed to Philip Sidney in a copy of verses signed with Spenser's masking name of *Immerito*. The avowed responsibility for it might have been inconvenient for a young man pushing his fortune among the cross currents of Elizabeth's court. But it was given to the world by a friend of the author's, signing himself E. K., now identified with Spenser's fellow-student at Pembroke, Edward Kirke, who dedicates it in a long, critical epistle of some interest to the author's friend, Gabriel Harvey, and after the fashion

of some of the Italian books of poetry, accompanies it with a gloss, explaining words, and to a certain extent, allusions. Two things are remarkable in Kirke's epistle. One is the confidence with which he announces the yet unrecognized excellence of "this one new poet," whom he is not afraid to put side by side with "that good old poet," Chaucer, the "loadstar of our language." The other point is the absolute reliance which he places on the powers of the English language, handled by one who has discerned its genius, and is not afraid to use its wealth. "In my opinion, it is one praise of many, that are due to this poet, that he hath laboured to restore, as to their rightful heritage, such good and natural English words, as have been long time out of use, or almost clean disherited, which is the only cause, that our mother tongue, which truly of itself is both full enough for prose, and stately enough for verse, hath long time been counted most bare and barren of both." The friends, Kirke and Harvey, were not wrong in their estimate of the importance of Spenser's work. The "new poet," as he came to be customarily called, had really made one of those distinct steps in his art, which answer to discoveries and inventions in other spheres of human interest—steps which make all behind them seem obsolete and mistaken. There was much in the new poetry which was immature and imperfect, not a little that was fantastic and affected. But it was the first adequate effort of reviving English poetry.

The *Shepherd's Calendar* consists of twelve compositions, with no other internal connexion than that they are assigned respectively to the twelve months of the year. They are all different in subject, metre, character, and excellence. They are called *Æglogues*, according to the

whimsical derivation adopted from the Italians of the word which the classical writers called Eclogues: "*Æglogai*, as it were αἰγῶν or αἰγονόμων λόγοι, that is, Goatherd's Tales." The book is in its form an imitation of that highly artificial kind of poetry which the later Italians of the Renaissance had copied from Virgil, as Virgil had copied it from the Sicilian and Alexandrian Greeks, and to which had been given the name of Bucolic or Pastoral. Petrarch, in imitation of Virgil, had written Latin Bucolics, as he had written a Latin Epic, his *Africa*. He was followed in the next century by Baptista Mantuanus (1448—1516), the "old Mantuan," of Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*, whose Latin "Eglogues" became a favourite school-book in England, and who was imitated by a writer who passed for a poet in the time of Henry VIII., Alexander Barclay. In the hands of the Sicilians, pastoral poetry may have been an attempt at idealizing country life almost as genuine as some of Wordsworth's poems; but it soon ceased to be that, and in Alexandrian hands it took its place among the recognized departments of classic and literary copying, in which Virgil found and used it. But a further step had been made since Virgil had adopted it as an instrument of his genius. In the hands of Mantuan and Barclay it was a vehicle for general moralizing, and in particular for severe satire on women and the clergy. And Virgil, though he may himself speak under the the names of Tityrus and Menalcas, and lament Julius Cæsar as Daphnis, did not conceive of the Roman world as peopled by flocks and sheep-cotes, or its emperors and chiefs, its poets, senators, and ladies, as shepherds and shepherdesses, of higher or lower degree. But in Spenser's time, partly through undue deference to what was supposed to be Italian taste, partly owing to the tardi-

ness of national culture, and because the poetic impulses had not yet gained power to force their way through the embarrassment and awkwardness which accompany reviving art,—the world was turned for the purposes of the poetry of civil life, into a pastoral scene. Poetical invention was held to consist in imagining an environment, a set of outward circumstances, as unlike as possible to the familiar realities of actual life and employment, in which the primary affections and passions had their play. A fantastic basis, varying according to the conventions of the fashion, was held essential for the representation of the ideal. Masquerade and hyperbole were the stage and scenery on which the poet's sweetnesss, or tenderness, or strength was to be put forth. The masquerade, when his subject belonged to peace, was one of shepherds: when it was one of war and adventure, it was a masquerade of knight errantry. But a masquerade was necessary, if he was to raise his composition above the vulgarities and trivialities of the street, the fire-side, the camp, or even the court; if he was to give it the dignity, the ornament, the unexpected results, the brightness, and colour, which belong to poetry. The fashion had the sanction of the brilliant author of the *Arcadia*, the "Courtier, Soldier, Scholar," who was the "mould of form," and whose judgment was law to all men of letters in the middle years of Elizabeth, the all-accomplished Philip Sidney. Spenser submitted to this fashion from first to last. When first he ventured on a considerable poetical enterprise, he spoke his thoughts, not in his own name, nor as his contemporaries ten years later did, through the mouth of characters in a tragic or comic drama, but through imaginary rustics, to whom every one else in the world was a rustic, and lived among the sheep-folds, with

a background of downs or vales or fields, and the open sky above. His shepherds and goatherds bear the homely names of native English clowns, Diggon Davie, Willye, and Piers; Colin Clout, adopted from Skelton, stands for Spenser himself; Hobbinol, for Gabriel Harvey; Cuddie, perhaps for Edward Kirke; names revived by Ambrose Phillips, and laughed at by Pope, when pastorals again came into vogue with the wits of Queen Anne.[1] With them are mingled classical ones like Menalcas, French ones from Marot, anagrams like Algrind for Grindal, significant ones like Palinode, plain ones like Lettice, and romantic ones like Rosalind; and no incongruity seems to be found in matching a beautiful shepherdess named Dido with a Great Shepherd called Lobbin, or when the verse requires it, Lobb. And not merely the speakers in the dialogue are shepherds; every one is in their view a shepherd. Chaucer is the "god of shepherds," and Orpheus is a—

> Shepherd that did fetch his dame
> From Pluto's baleful bower withouten leave."

The "fair Elisa," is the Queen of shepherds all; her great father is Pan, the shepherds' god, and Anne Boleyn is Syrinx. It is not unnatural that when the clergy are spoken of, as they are in three of the poems, the figure should be kept up. But it is curious to find that the shepherd's god, the great Pan, who stands in one connexion for Henry VIII., should in another represent in sober earnest the Redeemer and Judge of the world.[2]

The poems framed in this grotesque setting, are on many themes, and of various merit, and probably of different

[1] In the *Guardian*, No. 40. Compare Johnson's *Life of Ambrose Phillips*.

[2] *Shepherd's Calendar*, May, July, and September.

dates. Some are simply amatory effusions of an ordinary character, full of a lover's despair and complaint. Three or four are translations or imitations; translations from Marot, imitations from Theocritus, Bion, or Virgil. Two of them contain fables told with great force and humour. The story of the Oak and the Briar, related as his friendly commentator, Kirke, says, "so lively and so feelingly, as if the thing were set forth in some picture before our eyes," for the warning of "disdainful younkers," is a first fruit, and promise of Spenser's skill in vivid narrative. The fable of the Fox and the Kid, a curious illustration of the popular discontent at the negligence of the clergy, and the popular suspicions about the arts of Roman intriguers, is told with great spirit, and with mingled humour and pathos. There is of course a poem in honour of the great queen, who was the goddess of their idolatry to all the wits and all the learned of England, the "faire Eliza," and a compliment is paid to Leicester,

> The worthy whom she loveth best,—
> That first the White Bear to the stake did bring.

Two of them are avowedly burlesque imitations of rustic dialect and banter, carried on with much spirit. One composition is a funeral tribute to some unknown lady; another is a complaint of the neglect of poets by the great. In three of the Æglogues he comes on a more serious theme; they are vigorous satires on the loose living and greediness of clergy forgetful of their charge, with strong invectives against foreign corruption and against the wiles of the wolves and foxes of Rome, with frequent allusions to passing incidents in the guerilla war with the seminary priests, and with a warm eulogy on the faithfulness and wisdom of Archbishop Grindal;

whose name is disguised as old Algrind, and with whom in his disgrace the poet is not afraid to confess deep sympathy. They are, in a poetical form, part of that manifold and varied system of Puritan aggression on the established ecclesiastical order of England, which went through the whole scale from the "Admonition to Parliament," and the lectures of Cartwright and Travers, to the libels of Martin Mar-prelate: a system of attack which with all its injustice and violence, and with all its mischievous purposes, found but too much justification in the inefficiency and corruption of many both of the bishops and clergy, and in the rapacious and selfish policy of the government, forced to starve and cripple the public service, while great men and favourites built up their fortunes out of the prodigal indulgence of the Queen.

The collection of poems is thus a very miscellaneous one, and cannot be said to be in its subjects inviting. The poet's system of composition, also, has the disadvantage of being to a great degree unreal, forced and unnatural. Departing from the precedent of Virgil and the Italians, but perhaps copying the artificial Doric of the Alexandrians, he professes to make his language and style suitable to the "ragged and rustical" rudeness of the shepherds whom he brings on the scene, by making it both archaic and provincial. He found in Chaucer a store of forms and words sufficiently well known to be with a little help intelligible, and sufficiently out of common use to give the character of antiquity to a poetry which employed them. And from his sojourn in the North he is said to have imported a certain number of local peculiarities which would seem unfamiliar and harsh in the South. His editor's apology for this use of "ancient solemn words," as both proper and as orna-

mental, is worth quoting; it is an early instance of what is supposed to be not yet common, a sense of pleasure in that wildness which we call picturesque.

And first for the words to speak: I grant they be something hard, and of most men unused: yet English, and also used of most excellent Authors and most famous Poets. In whom, when as this our Poet hath been much travelled and throughly read, how could it be, (as that worthy Orator said,) but that 'walking in the sun, although for other cause he walked, yet needs he mought be sun-burnt'; and having the sound of those ancient poets still ringing in his ears, he mought needs, in singing, hit out some of their tunes. But whether he useth them by such casualty and custom, or of set purpose and choice, as thinking them fittest for such rustical rudeness of shepherds, either for that their rough sound would make his rymes more ragged and rustical, or else because such old and obsolete words are most used of country folks, sure I think, and I think not amiss, that they bring great grace, and, as one would say, authority, to the verse. . . . . Yet neither everywhere must old words be stuffed in, nor the common Dialect and manner of speaking so corrupted thereby, that, as in old buildings, it seem disorderly and ruinous. But as in most exquisite pictures they use to blaze and portrait not only the dainty lineaments of beauty, but also round about it to shadow the rude thickets and craggy cliffs, that by the baseness of such parts, more excellency may accrue to the principal—for ofttimes, we find ourselves I know not how, singularly delighted with the show of such natural rudeness, and take great pleasure in that disorderly order:—even so do these rough and harsh terms enlumine, and make more clearly to appear, the brightness of brave and glorious words. So oftentimes a discord in music maketh a comely concordance.

But when allowance is made for an eclectic and sometimes pedantic phraseology, and for mannerisms to which the fashion of the age tempted him, such as the extravagant use of alliteration, or, as they called it, "hunting the letter," the *Shepherd's Calendar* is, for its time, of great interest.

Spenser's force, and sustained poetical power, and singularly musical ear are conspicuous in this first essay of his genius. In the poets before him of this century, fragments and stanzas, and perhaps single pieces might be found, which might be compared with his work. Fugitive pieces, chiefly amatory, meet us of real sprightliness, or grace, or tenderness. The stanzas which Sackville, afterwards, Lord Buckhurst, contributed to the collection called the *Mirror of Magistrates*,[3] are marked with a pathetic majesty, a genuine sympathy for the precariousness of greatness, which seem a prelude to the Elizabethan drama. But these fragments were mostly felicitous efforts, which soon passed on into the ungainly, the uncouth, the obscure or the grotesque. But in the *Shepherd's Calendar* we have for the first time in the century, the swing, the command, the varied resources of the real poet, who is not driven by failing language or thought into frigid or tumid absurdities. Spenser is master over himself and his instrument even when he uses it in a way which offends our taste. There are passages in the *Shepherd's Calendar* of poetical eloquence, of refined vigour, and of musical and imaginative sweetness, such as the English language had never attained to, since the days of him, who was to the age of Spenser, what Shakespere and Milton are to ours, the pattern and fount of poetry, Chaucer. Dryden is not afraid to class Spenser with Theocritus and Virgil, and to write that the *Shepherd's Calendar* is not to be matched in any language.[4] And this was at once recognized. The authorship of it, as has been said, was not formally acknowledged. In-

[3] First published in 1559. It was popular book, and was often re-edited

[4] Dedication to Virgil.

deed, Mr. Collier remarks that seven years after its publication, and after it had gone through three or four separate editions, it was praised by a contemporary poet, George Whetstone, himself a friend of Spenser's, as the "reputed work of Sir Philip Sidney." But if it was officially a secret, it was an open secret, known to every one who cared to be well informed. It is possible that the free language used in it about ecclesiastical abuses was too much in sympathy with the growing fierceness and insolence of Puritan invective to be safely used by a poet who gave his name: and one of the reasons assigned for Burghley's dislike to Spenser is the praise bestowed in the *Shepherd's Calendar* on Archbishop Grindal, then in deep disgrace for resisting the suppression of the puritan prophesyings. But anonymous as it was, it had been placed under Sidney's protection; and it was at once warmly welcomed. It is not often that in those remote days we get evidence of the immediate effect of a book; but we have this evidence in Spenser's case. In this year, probably, after it was published, we find it spoken of by Philip Sidney, not without discriminating criticism, but as one of the few recent examples of poetry worthy to be named after Chaucer.

I account the *Mirror of Magistrates* meetly furnished of beautiful parts; and in the Earl of Surrey's *Lyrics* many things tasting of birth, and worthy of a noble mind. The *Shepherd's Calendar* hath much poetry in his Eglogues: indeed worthy the reading if I be not deceived. That same framing of his style in an old rustic language I dare not allow, sith neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sanazar in Italian, did affect it. Besides these do I not remember to have seen but few (to speak boldly) printed that have poetical sinews in them.

Sidney's patronage of the writer and general approval

of the work doubtless had something to do with making Spenser's name known: but he at once takes a place in contemporary judgment which no one else takes, till the next decade of the century. In 1586, Webbe published his *Discouse of English Poetrie*. In this, the author of the *Shepherd's Calendar* is spoken of by the name given him by its Editor, E. K——, as the "new poet," just as earlier in the century, the *Orlando Furioso* was styled the "nuova poesia;" and his work is copiously used to supply examples and illustrations of the critic's rules and observations. Webbe's review of existing poetry was the most comprehensive yet attempted: but the place which he gives to the new poet, whose name was in men's mouths, though like the author of *In Memoriam*, he had not placed it on his title-page, was one quite apart.

> This place [to wear the Laurel] have I purposely reserved for one, who, if not only, yet in my judgement principally, deserveth the title of the rightest English poet that ever I read: that is, the author of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, intituled to the worthy Gentleman Master Philip Sidney, whether it was Master Sp. or what rare scholar in Pembroke Hall soever, because himself and his friends, for what respect I know not, would not reveal it, I force not greatly to set down. Sorry I am that I cannot find none other with whom I might couple him in this catalogue in his rare gift of poetry: although one there is, though now long since seriously occupied in graver studies, Master Gabriel Harvey, yet as he was once his most special friend and fellow poet, so because he hath taken such pains not only in his Latin poetry . . . but also to reform our English verse . . . therefore will I adventure to set them together as two of the rarest wits and learnedest masters of poetry in England.

He even ventured to compare him favourably with Virgil.

But now yet at the last hath England hatched up one poet of this sort, in my conscience comparable with the best in any respect: even Master Sp., author of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, whose travail in that piece of English poetry I think verily is so commendable, as none of equal judgement can yield him less praise for his excellent skill and skilful excellency showed forth in the same than they would to either Theocritus or Virgil, whom in mine opinion, if the coarseness of our speech, (I mean the course of custom which he would not infringe,) had been no more let unto him than their pure native tongues were unto them, he would have, if it might be, surpassed them.

The courtly author of the *Arte of English Poesie*, 1589, commonly cited as G. Puttenham, classes him with Sidney. And from this time his name occurs in every enumeration of English poetical writers, till he appears, more than justifying this early appreciation of his genius, as Chaucer's not unworthy successor, in the *Faery Queen*. Afterwards, as other successful poetry was written, and the standards of taste were multiplied, this first enthusiastic reception cooled down. In James the First's time, Spenser's use of "old outworn words" is criticized as being no more "practical English" than Chaucer or Skelton: it is not "courtly" enough.[5] The success of the *Shepherd's Calendar* had also, apparently, substantial results, which some of his friends thought of with envy. They believed that it secured him high patronage, and opened to him a way to fortune. Poor Gabriel Harvey, writing in the year in which the *Shepherd's Calendar* came out, contrasts his own less favoured lot, and his ill-repaid poetical efforts, with Colin Clout's good luck.

But ever and ever, methinks, your great Catoes, *Ecquid erit pretii*, and our little Catoes, *Res age quæ prosunt*, make such

[5] Bolton in Haslewood, ii. 249.

a buzzing and ringing in my head, that I have little joy to animate and encourage either you or him to go forward, unless ye might make account of some certain ordinary wages, or at the least wise have your meat and drink for your day's works. As for myself, howsoever I have toyed and trifled heretofore, I am now taught, and I trust I shall shortly learn, (no remedy, I must of mere necessity give you over in the plain field) to employ my travail and time wholly or chiefly on those studies and practices that carry, as they say, meat in their mouth, having evermore their eye upon the Title, *De pane lucrando*, and their hand upon their halfpenny. For I pray now what saith Mr. Cuddie, alias you know who, in the tenth Æglogue of the aforesaid famous new Calendar.

* * * * *

The dapper ditties, that I wont devise
To feed youths' fancy and the flocking fry,
Delighten much: what I the best for thy?
They han the pleasure, I a sclender prize.
I beat the bush, the birds to them do fly.
What good thereof to Cuddie can arise?

But Master Colin Clout is not everybody, and albeit his old companions, Master Cuddie and Master Hobinoll, be as little beholding to their mistress poetry as ever you wist: yet he, peradventure, by the means of her special favour, and some personal privilege, may haply live by *Dying Pelicans*, and purchase great lands and lordships with 'the money which his *Calendar* and *Dreams* have, and will afford him.

CHAPTER III.

SPENSER IN IRELAND.

[1580.]

In the first week of October, 1579, Spenser was at Leicester House, expecting "next week" to be despatched on Leicester's service to France. Whether he was sent or not, we do not know. Gabriel Harvey, writing at the end of the month, wagers that "for all his saying, he will not be gone over sea, neither this week nor the next." In one of the Æglogues (September) there are some lines which suggest, but do not necessarily imply, the experience of an eye-witness of the state of religion in a Roman Catholic country. But we can have nothing but conjecture whether at this time or any other Spenser was on the Continent. The *Shepherd's Calendar* was entered at Stationers' Hall, December 5, 1579. In April, 1580, as we know from one of his letters to Harvey, he was at Westminster. He speaks of the *Shepherd's Calendar* as published; he is contemplating the publication of other pieces, and then "he will in hand forthwith with his *Fairie Queene*," of which he had sent Harvey a specimen. He speaks especially of his *Dreams* as a considerable work.

I take best my *Dreams* should come forth alone, being grown

by means of the Gloss (running continually in manner of a Paraphrase) full as great as my *Calendar*. Therein be some things excellently, and many things wittily discoursed of E. K., and the pictures so singularly set forth and portrayed, as if Michael Angelo were there, he could (I think) nor amend the best, nor reprehend the worst. I know you would like them passing well.

It is remarkable that of a book so spoken of, as of the *Nine Comedies*, not a trace, as far as appears, is to be found. He goes on to speak with much satisfaction of another composition, which was probably incorporated, like the *Epithalamion Thamesis*, in his later work.

Of my *Stemmata Dudleiana*, and specially of the sundry Apostrophes therein, addressed you know to whom, much more advisement he had, than so lightly to send them abroad: now list, trust me (though I do never very well) yet, in mine own fancy, I never did better. *Veruntamen te sequor solum: nunquam vero assequar.*

He is plainly not dissatisfied with his success, and is looking forward to more. But no one in those days could live by poetry. Even scholars, in spite of university endowments, did not hope to live by their scholarship; and the poet or man of letters only trusted that his work, by attracting the favour of the great, might open to him the door of advancement. Spenser was probably expecting to push his fortunes in some public employment under the patronage of two such powerful favourites as Sidney and his uncle Leicester. Spenser's heart was set on poetry: but what leisure he might have for it would depend on the course his life might take. To have hung on Sidney's protection, or gone with him as his secretary to the wars, to have been employed at home or abroad ester's intrigues, to have stayed in London filling

by Leicester's favour some government office, to have had his habits moulded and his thoughts affected by the brilliant and unscrupulous society of the court, or by the powerful and daring minds which were fast thronging the political and literary scene—any of these contingencies might have given his poetical faculty a different direction; nay, might have even abridged its exercise or suppressed it. But his life was otherwise ordered. A new opening presented itself. He had, and he accepted, the chance of making his fortune another way. And to his new manner of life, with its peculiar conditions, may be ascribed, not indeed the original idea of that which was to be his great work, but the circumstances under which the work was carried out, and which not merely coloured it, but gave it some of its special and characteristic features.

That which turned the course of his career, and exercised a decisive influence, certainly on its events and fate, probably also on the turn of his thoughts and the shape and moulding of his work, was his migration to Ireland, and his settlement there for the greater part of the remaining eighteen years of his life. We know little more than the main facts of this change from the court and the growing intellectual activity of England, to the fierce and narrow interests of a cruel and unsuccessful struggle for colonization, in a country which was to England much what Algeria was to France some thirty years ago. Ireland, always unquiet, had became a serious danger to Elizabeth's Government. It was its "bleeding ulcer." Lord Essex's great colonizing scheme, with his unscrupulous severity, had failed. Sir Henry Sidney, wise, firm, and wishing to be just, had tried his hand as Deputy for the third time in the thankless charge of keeping order; he, too, after a

short gleam of peace, had failed also. For two years Ireland had been left to the local administration, totally unable to heal its wounds, or cope with its disorders. And now, the kingdom threatened to become a vantage-ground to the foreign enemy. In November, 1579, the Government turned their eyes on Arthur, Lord Grey of Wilton, a man of high character, and a soldier of distinction. He, or they, seem to have hesitated; or rather, the hesitation was on both sides. He was not satisfied with many things in the policy of the Queen in England: his discontent had led him, strong Protestant as he was, to coquet with Norfolk and the partisans of Mary Queen of Scots, when England was threatened with a French marriage ten years before. His name stands among the forty nobles on whom Mary's friends counted.[1] And on the other hand, Elizabeth did not like him or trust him. For some time she refused to employ him. At length, in the summer of 1580, he was appointed to fill that great place which had wrecked the reputation and broken the hearts of a succession of able and high-spirited servants of the English Crown, the place of Lord-Deputy in Ireland. He was a man who was interested in the literary enterprise of the time. In the midst of his public employment in Holland, he had been the friend and patron of George Gascoigne, who left a high reputation, for those days, as poet, wit, satirist, and critic. Lord Grey now took Spenser, the "new poet," the friend of Philip Sidney, to Ireland as his Secretary.

Spenser was not the only scholar and poet who about this time found public employment in Ireland. Names which appear in literary records, such as Warton's *History of English Poetry*, poets like Barnaby Googe and Ludovic

[1] Froude, x. 158.

Bryskett, reappear as despatch-writers or agents in the Irish State Papers. But one man came over to Ireland about the same time as Spenser, whose fortunes were a contrast to his. Geoffrey Fenton was one of the numerous translators of the time. He had dedicated Tragical Tales from the French and Italian to Lady Mary Sidney, Guevara's Epistles from the Spanish to Lady Oxford, and a translation of Guicciardini to the Queen. About this time, he was recommended by his brother to Walsingham for foreign service; he was soon after in Ireland: and in the summer of 1580, he was made Secretary to the Government. He shortly became one of the most important persons in the Irish administration. He corresponded confidentially and continually with Burghley and Walsingham. He had his eye on the proceedings of Deputies and Presidents, and reported freely their misdoings or their unpopularity. His letters form a considerable part of the Irish Papers. He became a powerful and successful public servant. He became Sir Geoffrey Fenton; he kept his high place for his life; he obtained grants and lands; and he was commemorated as a great personage, in a pompous monument in St. Patrick's Cathedral. This kind of success was not to be Spenser's.

Lord Grey of Wilton was a man in whom his friends saw a high and heroic spirit. He was a statesman in whose motives and actions his religion had a dominant influence: and his religion—he is called by the vague name of Puritan—was one which combined a strong and doubtless genuine zeal for the truth of Christian doctrine and for purity of morals, with the deepest and deadliest hatred of what he held to be their natural enemy, the Anti-Christ of Rome. The "good Lord Grey," he was, if

we believe his secretary, writing many years after this time, and when he was dead, "most gentle, affable, loving, and temperate; always known to be a most just, sincere, godly, and right noble man, far from sternness, far from unrighteousness." But the infelicity of his times bore hardly upon him, and Spenser admits, what is known otherwise, that he left a terrible name behind him. He was certainly a man of severe and unshrinking sense of duty, and like many great Englishmen of the time, so resolute in carrying it out to the end, that it reached, when he thought it necessary, to the point of ferocity. Naturally, he had enemies, who did not spare his fame; and Spenser, who came to admire and reverence him, had to lament deeply that "that good lord was blotted with the name of a bloody man," one who "regarded not the life of the queen's subjects no more than dogs, and had wasted and consumed all, so as now she had nothing almost left, but to reign in their ashes."

Lord Grey was sent over at a moment of the utmost confusion and danger. In July, 1579, Drury wrote to Burghley to stand firmly to the helm, for "that a great storm was at hand." The South of Ireland was in fierce rebellion, under the Earl of Desmond and Dr. Nicolas Sanders, who was acting under the commission of the Pope, and promising the assistance of the King of Spain; and a band of Spanish and Italian adventurers, unauthorized, but not uncountenanced by their Government, like Drake in the Indies, had landed with arms and stores, and had fortified a port at Smerwick, on the south-western coast of Kerry. The North was deep in treason, restless, and threatening to strike. Round Dublin itself, the great Irish Lords of the Pale, under Lord Baltinglass, in the summer of 1580, had broken into open insurrection, and

were holding out a hand to the rebels of the South. The English garrisons, indeed, small as they were, could not only hold their own against the ill-armed and undisciplined Irish bands, but could inflict terrible chastisement on the insurgents. The native feuds were turned to account; Butlers were set to destroy their natural enemies the Geraldines, and the Earl of Ormond their head, was appointed General in Munster, to execute English vengeance and his own on the lands and people of his rival Desmond. But the English chiefs were not strong enough to put down the revolt. "The conspiracy throughout Ireland," wrote Lord Grey, "is so general, that without a main force it will not be appeased. There are cold service and unsound dealing generally." On the 12th of August, 1580, Lord Grey landed, amid a universal wreck of order, of law, of mercy, of industry; and among his counsellors and subordinates, the only remedy thought of was that of remorseless and increasing severity.

It can hardly be doubted that Spenser must have come over with him. It is likely that where he went, his Secretary would accompany him. And if so, Spenser must soon have become acquainted with some of the scenes and necessities of Irish life. Within three weeks after Lord Grey's landing, he and those with him were present at the disaster of Glenmalure, a rocky defile near Wicklow, where the rebels enticed the English captains into a position in which an ambuscade had been prepared, after the manner of Red Indians in the last century, and of South African savages now, and where, in spite of Lord Grey's courage, "which could not have been bettered by Hercules," a bloody defeat was inflicted on his troops, and a number of distinguished officers were cut off. But Spenser was soon to see a still more terrible example of

this ruthless warfare. It was necessary, above all things to destroy the Spanish fort at Smerwick, in order to prevent the rebellion being fed from abroad: and in November, 1580, Lord Grey in person undertook the work. The incidents of this tragedy have been fully recorded, and they formed at the time a heavy charge against Lord Grey's humanity, and even his honour. In this instance Spenser must almost certainly have been on the spot. Years afterwards, in his *View of the State of Ireland*, he describes and vindicates Lord Grey's proceedings; and he does so, "being," as he writes, "as near them as any." And we have Lord Grey's own despatch to Queen Elizabeth, containing a full report of the tragical business. We have no means of knowing how Lord Grey employed Spenser, or whether he composed his own despatches. But from Spenser's position, the Secretary, if he had not some hand in the following vivid and forcible account of the taking of Smerwick,[2] must probably have been cognizant of it; though there are some slight differences in the despatch, and in the account which Spenser himself wrote afterwards in his pamphlet on Irish Affairs.

After describing the proposal of the garrison for a parley, Lord Grey proceeds,—

> There was presently sent unto me one Alexandro, their camp master; he told me that certain Spaniards and Italians were there arrived upon fair speeches and great promises, which altogether vain and false they found; and that it was no part of their intent to molest or take any government from your Majesty; for proof, that they were ready to depart as they came and deliver into my hands the fort. Mine answer was, that for that I perceived their people to stand of two nations,

[2] Calendar of State Papers Ireland, 1574—1585. Mr. H. C. Hamilton's Pref. p. lxxi—lxxiii. Nov. 12, 1580.

Italian and Spanish, I would give no answer unless a Spaniard was likewise by. He presently went and returned with a Spanish captain. I then told the Spaniard that I knew their nation to have an absolute prince, one that was in good league and amity with your Majesty, which made me to marvell that any of his people should be found associate with them that went about to maintain rebels against you. . . And taking it that it could not be his king's will, I was to know by whom and for what cause they were sent. His reply was that the king had not sent them, but that one John Martinez de Ricaldi, Governor for the king at Bilboa, had willed him to levy a band and repair with it to St. Andrews (Santander), and there to be directed by this their colonel here, whom he followed as a blind man, not knowing whither. The other avouched that they were all sent by the Pope for the defence of the *Catholica fede*. My answer was, that I would not greatly have marvelled if men being commanded by natural and absolute princes did sometimes take in hand wrong actions; but that men, and that of account as some of them made show of, should be carried into unjust, desperate, and wicked actions, by one that neither from God or man could claim any princely power or empire, but (was) indeed a detestable shaveling, the right Antichrist and general ambitious tyrant over all right principalities, and patron of the *Diabolica fede*—this I could not but greatly rest in wonder. Their fault therefore far to be aggravated by the vileness of their commander; and that at my hands no condition or composition they were to expect, other than they should render me the fort, and yield their selves to my will for life or death. With this answer he departed; after which there was one or two courses to and fro more, to have gotten a certainty for some of their lives: but finding that it would not be, the colonel himself about sunsetting came forth and requested respite with surcease of arms till the next morning, and then he would give a resolute answer.

Finding that to be but a gain of time to them, and a loss of the same for myself, I definitely answered I would not grant it, and therefore presently either that he took my offer or else return and I would fall to my business. He then embraced my knees simply putting himself to my mercy, only he prayed that

for that night he might abide in the fort, and that in the morning all should be put into my hands. I asked hostages for the performance; they were given. Morning came; I presented my companies in battle before the fort, the colonel comes forth with ten or twelve of his chief gentlemen, trailing their ensigns rolled up, and presented them unto me with their lives and the fort. I sent straight certain gentlemen in, to see their weapons and armour laid down, and to guard the munition and victual there left for spoil. Then put I in certain bands, who straight fell to execution. There were six hundred slain. Munition and victual great store: though much wasted through the disorder of the soldier, which in that fury could not be helped. Those that I gave life unto, I have bestowed upon the captains and gentlemen whose service hath well deserved. . . Of the six hundred slain, four hundred were as gallant and goodly personages as of any (soldiers) I ever beheld. So hath it pleased the Lord of Hosts to deliver your enemies into your Highnesses' hand, and so too as one only excepted, not one of yours is either lost or hurt.

Another account adds to this that "the Irish men and women were hanged, with an Englishman who had served Dr. Sanders, and two others whose arms and legs were broken for torture."

Such scenes as those of Glenmalure and Smerwick, terrible as they were, it might have been any one's lot to witness who found himself in presence of the atrocious warfare of those cruel days, in which the ordinary exasperation of combatants was made more savage and unforgiving by religious hatred, and by the license which religious hatred gave to irregular adventure and the sanguinary repression of it. They were not confined to Ireland. Two years later the Marquis de Santa Cruz treated in exactly the same fashion a band of French adventurers, some eighty noblemen and gentlemen and two hundred soldiers, who were taken in an attempt on

the Azores during a time of nominal peace between the crowns of France and Spain. In the Low Countries, and in the religious wars of France, it need not be said that even the 'execution' at Smerwick was continually outdone; and it is what the Spaniards would of course have done to Drake if they had caught him. Nor did the Spanish Government complain of this treatment of its subjects, who had no legal commission.

But the change of scene and life to Spenser was much more than merely the sight of a disastrous skirmish and a capitulation without quarter. He had passed to an entirely altered condition of social life; he had passed from pleasant and merry England, with its comparative order and peace, its thriving homesteads and wealthy cities, its industry and magnificence,—

> Eliza's blessed field,
> That still with people, peace, and plenty flows—

to a land, beautiful indeed, and alluring, but of which the only law was disorder, and the only rule failure. The Cambridge student, the follower of country life in Lancashire or Kent, the scholar discussing with Philip Sidney and corresponding with Gabriel Harvey about classical metres and English rimes; the shepherd poet, Colin Clout, delicately fashioning his innocent pastorals, his love complaints, or his dexterous panegyrics or satires; the courtier, aspiring to shine in the train of Leicester before the eyes of the great queen,—found himself transplanted into a wild and turbulent savagery, where the elements of civil society hardly existed, and which had the fatal power of drawing into its own evil and lawless ways the English who came into contact with it. Ireland had the name and the framework of a Christian realm. It had its hierarchy of officers in Church and State, its

Parliament, its representative of the Crown. It had its great earls and lords, with noble and romantic titles, its courts and councils and administration; the Queen's laws were there, and where they were acknowledged, which was not, however, everywhere, the English speech was current. But underneath this name and outside, all was coarse, and obstinately set against civilized order. There was nothing but the wreck and clashing of disintegrated customs, the lawlessness of fierce and ignorant barbarians, whose own laws had been destroyed, and who would recognize no other; the blood-feuds of rival septs; the ambitious and deadly treacheries of rival nobles, oppressing all weaker than themselves, and maintaining in waste and idleness their crowds of brutal retainers. In one thing only was there agreement, though not even in this was there union; and that was in deep, implacable hatred of their English masters. And with these English masters, too, amid their own jealousies and backbitings and mischief-making, their own bitter antipathies and chronic despair, there was only one point of agreement, and that was their deep scorn and loathing of the Irish.

This is Irish dealing with Irish, in Munster at this time:—

> The Lord Roche kept a freeholder, who had eight plowlands, prisoner, and hand-locked him till he had surrendered seven plowlands and a half, on agreement to keep the remaining plowland free; but when this was done, the Lord Roche extorted as many exactions from that half-plowland, as from any other half-plowland in his country. . . . And even the great men were under the same oppression from the greater: for the Earl of Desmond forcibly took away the Seneschal of Imokilly's corn from his own land, though he was one of the most considerable gentlemen in Munster.[3]

[3] Cox, Hist. of Ireland, 354.

And this is English dealing with Irish :—

Mr. Henry Sheffield asks Lord Burghley's interest with Sir George Carew, to be made his deputy at Leighlin, in place of Mr. Bagenall, who met his death under the following circumstances :—

Mr. Bagenall, after he had bought the barony of Odrone of Sir George Carew, could not be contented to let the Kavanaghs enjoy such lands as old Sir Peter Carew, young Sir Peter, and last, Sir George were content that they should have, but threatened to kill them wherever he could meet them. As it is now fallen out, about the last of November, one Henry Heron, Mr. Bagenall's brother-in-law, having lost four kine, making that his quarrel, he being accompanied with divers others to the number of twenty or thereabouts, by the procurement of his brother-in-law, went to the house of Mortagh Oge, a man seventy years old, the chief of the Kavanaghs, with their swords drawn: which the old man seeing, for fear of his life, sought to go into the woods, but was taken and brought before Mr. Heron, who charged him that his son had taken the cows. The old man answered that he could pay for them. Mr. Heron would not be contented, but bade his men kill him, he desiring to be brought for trial at the sessions. Further, the morrow after they went again into the woods, and there they found another old man, a servant of Mortagh Oge, and likewise killed him, Mr. Heron saying that it was because he would not confess the cows.

On these murders, the sons of the old man laid an ambush for Mr. Bagenall; who, following them more upon will than with discretion, fell into their hands, and were slain with thirteen more. He had sixteen wounds above his girdle, and one of his legs cut off, and his tongue drawn out of his mouth and slit. There is not one man dwelling in all this country that was Sir George Carew's, but every man fled, and left the whole country waste; and so I fear me it will continue, now the deadly feud is so great between them.[4]

Something like this has been occasionally seen in our

[4] Irish Papers, March 29, 1587.

colonies towards the native races; but there it never reached the same height of unrestrained and frankly justified indulgence. The English officials and settlers knew well enough that the only thought of the native Irish was to restore their abolished customs, to recover their confiscated lands, to re-establish the crippled power of their chiefs; they knew that for this insurrection was ever ready, and that treachery would shrink from nothing. And to meet it, the English on the spot—all but a few who were denounced as unpractical sentimentalists for favouring an irreconcilable foe—could think of no way of enforcing order, except by a wholesale use of the sword and the gallows. They could find no means of restoring peace except turning the rich land into a wilderness, and rooting out by famine those whom the soldier or the hangman had not overtaken. "No governor shall do any good here," wrote an English observer in 1581, "except he show himself a Tamerlane."

In a general account, even contemporary, such statements might suggest a violent suspicion of exaggeration. We possess the means of testing it. The Irish State Papers of the time contain the ample reports and letters, from day to day, of the energetic and resolute Englishmen employed in council or in the field—men of business like Sir William Pelham, Sir Henry Wallop, Edward Waterhouse, and Geoffrey Fenton;—daring and brilliant officers, like Sir William Drury, Sir Nicolas Malby, Sir Warham St. Leger, Sir John Norreys, and John Zouch. These papers are the basis of Mr. Froude's terrible chapters on the Desmond rebellion, and their substance in abstract or abridgment is easily accessible in the printed calendars of the Record Office. They show that from first to last, in principle and practice, in council and in act, the Tamer-

lane system was believed in, and carried out without a trace of remorse or question as to its morality. "If hell were open, and all the evil spirits were abroad," writes Walsingham's correspondent Andrew Trollope, who talked about Tamerlane, "they could never be worse than these Irish rogues—rather dogs, and worse than dogs, for dogs do but after their kind, and they degenerate from all humanity." There is but one way of dealing with wild dogs or wolves; and accordingly the English chiefs insisted that this was the way to deal with the Irish. The state of Ireland, writes one, "is like an old cloak often before patched, wherein is now made so great a gash that all the world doth know that there is no remedy but to make a new." This means, in the language of another, "that there is no way to daunt these people but by the edge of the sword, and to plant better in their place, or rather, let them cut one another's throats." These were no idle words. Every page of these papers contains some memorandum of execution and destruction. The progress of a Deputy, or the President of a province, through the country is always accompanied with its tale of hangings. There is sometimes a touch of the grotesque. "At Kilkenny," writes Sir W. Drury, "the jail being full, we caused sessions immediately to begin. Thirty-six persons were executed, among which some good ones; two for treason, a blackamoor, and two witches by natural law, for that we found no law to try them by in this realm." It is like the account of some unusual kind of game in a successful bag. "If taking of cows, and killing of kerne and churles had been worth advertizing," writes Lord Grey to the Queen, "I would have had every day to have troubled your Highness." Yet Lord Grey protests in the same letter that he has never taken the life of any, how-

ever evil, who submitted. At the end of the Desmond outbreak, the chiefs in the different provinces send in their tale of death. Ormond complains of the false reports of his "slackness in but killing three men," whereas the number was more than 3000; and he sends in his "brief note" of his contribution to the slaughter, "598 persons of quality, besides 3000 or 4000 others, and 158 slain since his discharge." The end was that, as one of the chief actors writes, Sir Warham St. Leger, "Munster is nearly unpeopled by the murders done by the rebels, and the killings by the soldiers; 30,000 dead of famine in half a year, besides numbers that are hanged and killed. The realm," he adds, "was never in greater danger, or in like misery." But in the murderous work itself there was not much danger. "Our wars," writes Sir Henry Wallop, in the height of the struggle, "are but like fox-hunting." And when the English Government remonstrates against this system of massacre, the Lord-Deputy writes back that "he sorrows that pity for the wicked and evil should be enchanted into her Majesty."

And of this dreadful policy, involving, as the price of the extinction of Desmond's rebellion, the absolute desolation of the South and West of Ireland, Lord Grey came to be the deliberate and unfaltering champion. His administration lasted only two years, and in spite of his natural kindness of temper, which we need not doubt, it was, from the supposed necessities of his position, and the unwavering consent of all English opinions round him, a rule of extermination. No scruple ever crossed his mind, except that he had not been sufficiently uncompromising in putting first the religious aspect of the quarrel. "If Elizabeth had allowed him," writes Mr. Froude, "he would have now made a Mahommedan conquest of the whole island, and

offered the Irish the alternative of the Gospel or the sword." With the terrible sincerity of a Puritan, he reproached himself that he had allowed even the Queen's commands to come before the "one article of looking to God's dear service." "I confess my sin," he wrote to Walsingham, "I have followed man too much," and he saw why his efforts had been in vain. "Baal's prophets and councillors shall prevail. I see it is so. I see it is just. I see it past help. I rest despaired." His policy of blood and devastation, breaking the neck of Desmond's rebellion, but failing to put an end to it, became at length more than the home Government could bear; and with mutual dissatisfaction he was recalled before his work was done. Among the documents relating to his explanations with the English Government, is one of which this is the abstract: "Declaration (Dec. 1583), by Arthur, Lord Grey, of Wilton, to the Queen, showing the state of Ireland when he was appointed Deputy, with the services of his government, and the plight he left it in. 1485 chief men and gentlemen slain, not accounting those of meaner sort, nor yet executions by law, and killing of churles, which were innumerable."

This was the world into which Spenser was abruptly thrown, and in which he was henceforward to have his home. He first became acquainted with it as Lord Grey's Secretary in the Munster war. He himself in later days with ample experience and knowledge reviewed the whole of this dreadful history, its policy, its necessities, its results: and no more instructive document has come down to us from those times. But his description of the way in which the plan of extermination was carried out in Munster before his eyes, may fittingly form a supplement to the language on the spot of those responsible for it.

Eudox. But what, then, shall be the conclusion of this war? . . .

Iren.—The end will I assure me be very short and much sooner than can be, in so great a trouble, as it seemeth, hoped for, although there should none of them fall by the sword nor be slain by the soldier: yet thus being kept from manurance and their cattle from running abroad, by this hard restraint they would quickly consume themselves, and devour one another. The proof whereof I saw sufficiently exampled in these late wars of Munster; for notwithstanding that the same was a most rich and plentiful country, full of corn and cattle that you would have thought they should have been able to stand long, yet ere one year and a half they were brought to such wretchedness as that any stony heart would have rued the same. Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them; they looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat the dead carrions, happy where they could find them, yea and one another soon after, insomuch that the very carcases they spared not to scrape out of their graves; and if they found a plot of water-cresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for a time, yet not able long to continue there withal; that in a short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentiful country suddenly left void of man and beast; yet sure in all that war there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremity of famine which they themselves had wrought.

It is hardly surprising that Lord Grey's Secretary should share the opinions and the feelings of his master and patron. Certainly in his company and service, Spenser learned to look upon Ireland and the Irish with the impatience and loathing which filled most Englishmen; and it must be added with the same greedy eyes. In this new atmosphere, in which his life was henceforth spent, amid the daily talk of ravage and death, the daily scramble for the spoils of rebels and traitors,

the daily alarms of treachery and insurrection, a man naturally learns hardness. Under Spenser's imaginative richness, and poetic delicacy of feeling, there appeared two features. There was a shrewd sense of the practical side of things: and there was a full share of that sternness of temper which belonged to the time. He came to Ireland for no romantic purpose: he came to make his fortune as well as he could: and he accepted the conditions of the place and scene, and entered at once into the game of adventure and gain which was the natural one for all English comers, and of which the prizes were lucrative offices and forfeited manors and abbeys. And in the native population and native interests, he saw nothing but what called forth not merely antipathy, but deep moral condemnation. It was not merely that the Irish were ignorant, thriftless, filthy, debased and loathsome in their pitiable misery and despair: it was that in his view, justice, truth, honesty had utterly perished among them, and therefore were not due to them. Of any other side to the picture, he like other good Englishmen, was entirely unconscious: he saw only on all sides of him the empire of barbarism and misrule which valiant and godly Englishmen were fighting to vanquish and destroy—fighting against apparent but not real odds. And all this was aggravated by the stiff adherence of the Irish to their old religion. Spenser came over with the common opinion of Protestant Englishmen, that they had at least in England the pure and undoubted religion of the Bible: and in Ireland, he found himself face to face with the very superstition in its lowest forms which he had so hated in England. He left it plotting in England; he found it in armed rebellion in Ireland. Like Lord Grey, he saw in Popery the root of all the mischiefs of Ireland;

and his sense of true religion, as well as his convictions of right, conspired to recommend to him Lord Grey's pitiless government. The opinion was everywhere—it was undisputed and unexamined—that a policy of force, direct or indirect, was the natural and right way of reducing diverging religions to submission and uniformity: that religious disagreement ought as a matter of principle to be subdued by violence of one degree or another. All wise and good men thought so: all statesmen and rulers acted so. Spenser found in Ireland a state of things which seemed to make this doctrine the simplest dictate of common sense.

In August, 1582, Lord Grey left Ireland. He had accepted his office with the utmost reluctance, from the known want of agreement between the Queen and himself as to policy. He had executed it in a way which greatly displeased the home Government. And he gave it up with his special work, the extinction of Desmond's rebellion, still unaccomplished. In spite of the thousands slain, and a province made a desert, Desmond was still at large and dangerous. Lord Grey had been ruthlessly severe, and yet not successful. For months there had been an interchange of angry letters between him and the Government. Burghley, he complains to Walsingham, was "so heavy against him." The Queen and Burghley wanted order restored, but did not like either the expense of war, or the responsibility before other governments for the severity which their agents on the spot judged necessary. Knowing that he did not please, he had begun to solicit his recall before he had been a year in Ireland; and at length he was recalled, not to receive thanks, but to meet a strict, if not hostile, inquiry into his administration. Besides what had been on the surface

of his proceedings to dissatisfy the Queen, there had been, as in the case of every Deputy, a continued underground stream of backbiting and insinuation going home against him. Spenser did not forget this, when in the *Faery Queen* he shadowed forth Lord Grey's career in the adventures of Arthegal, the great Knight of Justice, met on his return home from his triumphs by the hags, Envy and Detraction, and the braying of the hundred tongues of the Blatant Beast. Irish lords and partisans, calling themselves loyal, when they could not get what they wanted, or when he threatened them for their insincerity or insolence, at once wrote to England. His English colleagues, civil and military, were his natural rivals or enemies, ever on the watch to spy out and report, if necessary, to misrepresent, what was questionable or unfortunate in his proceedings. Permanent officials like Archbishop Adam Loftus the Chancellor, or Treasurer Wallop, or Secretary Fenton, knew more than he did; they corresponded directly with the ministers; they knew that they were expected to keep a strict watch on his expenditure; and they had no scruple to send home complaints against him behind his back, as they did against one another. A secretary in Dublin like Geoffrey Fenton is described as a moth in the garment of every Deputy. Grey himself complains of the underhand work; he cannot prevent "backbiters' report:" he has found of late "very suspicious dealing amongst all his best esteemed associates;" he "dislikes not to be informed of the charges against him." In fact, they were accusing him of one of the gravest sins of which a Deputy could be guilty; they were writing home that he was lavishing the forfeited estates among his favourites, under pretence of rewarding service, to the great loss and permanent damage of her

Majesty's revenue; and they were forwarding plans for commissions to distribute these estates, of which the Deputy should not be a member.

He had the common fate of those who accepted great responsibilities under the Queen. He was expected to do very hard tasks with insufficient means, and to receive more blame where he failed than thanks where he succeeded. He had every one, English and Irish, against him in Ireland, and no one for him in England. He was driven to violence because he wanted strength; he took liberties with forfeitures belonging to the Queen because he had no other means of rewarding public services. It is not easy to feel much sympathy for a man who, brave and public spirited as he was, could think of no remedy for the miseries of Ireland but wholesale bloodshed. Yet, compared with the resident officials who caballed against him, and who got rich on these miseries, the Wallops and Fentons of the Irish Council, this stern Puritan, so remorseless in what he believed to be his duty to his Queen and his faith, stands out as an honest and faithful public servant of a Government which seemed hardly to know its own mind, which vacillated between indulgence and severity, and which hampered its officers by contradictory policies, ignorant of their difficulties, and incapable of controlling the supplies for a costly and wasteful war. Lord Grey's strong hand, though incapable of reaching the real causes of Irish evils, undoubtedly saved the country at a moment of serious peril, and once more taught lawless Geraldines, and Eustaces, and Burkes the terrible lesson of English power. The work which he had half done in crushing Desmond was soon finished by Desmond's hereditary rival, Ormond; and under the milder, but not more popular, rule of his successor, the proud and irritable Sir

John Perrot, Ireland had for a few years the peace which consisted in the absence of a definite rebellion, till Tyrone began to stir in 1595, and Perrot went back a disgraced man, to die a prisoner in the Tower.

Lord Grey left behind him unappeasable animosities, and returned to meet jealous rivals and an ill-satisfied mistress. But he had left behind one whose admiration and reverence he had won, and who was not afraid to take care of his reputation. Whether Spenser went back with his patron or not in 1582, he was from henceforth mainly resident in Ireland. Lord Grey's administration, and the principles on which it had been carried on, had made a deep impression on Spenser's mind. His first ideal had been Philip Sidney, the attractive and all-accomplished gentleman.—

> The President
> Of noblesse and of chevalrie,—

And to the end the pastoral Colin Clout, for he ever retained his first poetic name, was faithful to his ideal. But in the stern Proconsul, under whom he had become hardened into a keen and resolute colonist, he had come in contact with a new type of character; a governor under the sense of duty, doing the roughest of work in the roughest of ways. In Lord Grey, he had this character, not as he might read of it in books, but acting out its qualities in present life, amid the unexpected emergencies, the desperate alternatives, the calls for instant decision, the pressing necessities and the anxious hazards, of a course full of uncertainty and peril. He had before his eyes day by day, fearless, unshrinking determination, in a hateful and most unpromising task. He believed that he saw a living example of strength, manliness, and noble-

ness; of unsparing and unswerving zeal for order and religion, and good government; of single-hearted devotion to truth and right, and to the Queen. Lord Grey grew at last, in the poet's imagination, into the image and representative of perfect and masculine justice. When Spenser began to enshrine in a great allegory his ideas of human life and character, Lord Grey supplied the moral features, and almost the name, of one of its chief heroes. Spenser did more than embody his memory in poetical allegories. In Spenser's *View of the present State of Ireland*, written some years after Lord Grey's death, he gives his mature, and then at any rate, disinterested approbation of Lord Grey's administration, and his opinion of the causes of its failure. He kindles into indignation when "most untruely and maliciously, those evil tongues backbite and slander the sacred ashes of that most just and honourable personage, whose least virtue, of many most excellent, which abounded in his heroical spirit, they were never able to aspire unto."

Lord Grey's patronage had brought Spenser into the public service; perhaps that patronage, the patronage of a man who had powerful enemies, was the cause that Spenser's preferments, after Lord Grey's recall, were on so moderate a scale. The notices which we glean from indirect sources about Spenser's employment in Ireland are meagre enough, but they are distinct. They show him as a subordinate public servant, of no great account, but yet, like other public servants in Ireland, profiting, in his degree, by the opportunities of the time. In the spring following Lord Grey's arrival (March 22, 1581), Spenser was appointed Clerk of Decrees and Recognizances in the Irish Court of Chancery, retaining his place as Secretary to the Lord-Deputy, in which character his signature some-

times appears in the Irish Records, certifying State documents sent to England. This office is said by Fuller to have been a "lucrative" one. In the same year he received a lease of the Abbey and Manor of Enniscorthy, in the County of Wexford. Enniscorthy was an important post in the network of English garrisons, on one of the roads from Dublin to the South. He held it but for a short time. It was transferred by him to a citizen of Wexford, Richard Synot, an agent, apparently, of the powerful Sir Henry Wallop, the Treasurer; and it was soon after transferred by Synot to his patron, an official who secured to himself a large share of the spoils of Desmond's rebellion. Further, Spenser's name appears, in a list of persons (January, 1582), among whom Lord Grey had distributed some of the forfeited property of the rebels—a list sent home by him in answer to charges of waste and damage to the Queen's revenue, busily urged against him in Ireland by men like Wallop and Fenton, and readily listened to by English ministers like Burghley, who complained that Ireland was a "gulf of consuming treasure." The grant was mostly to persons active in service, among others one to Wallop himself; and a certain number of smaller value to persons of Lord Grey's own household. There, among yeomen ushers, gentlemen ushers, gentlemen serving the Lord-Deputy, and Welshmen and Irishmen with uncouth names, to whom small gratifications had been allotted out of the spoil, we read—"the lease of a house in Dublin belonging to [Lord] Baltinglas for six years to come to Edmund Spenser, one of the Lord-Deputy's Secretaries, valued at 5*l.*" . . . "of a 'custodiam' of John Eustace's [one of Baltinglas' family] land of the Newland to Edmund Spenser, one of the Lord-Deputy's Secretaries." In July, 1586, when every one

was full of the project for "planting" Munster, he was still in Dublin, for he addresses from thence a sonnet to Gabriel Harvey. In March, 158$\frac{8}{9}$, we find the following, in a list of officers on the establishment of the province of Munster, which the government was endeavouring to colonize from the west of England: "Lodovick Briskett, clerk to the council (at 20*l.* per annum), 13*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* (this is exercised by one Spenser, as deputy for the said Briskett, to whom (i. e. Briskett) it was granted by patent 6 Nov. 25 Eliz. (1583)." (*Carew MSS.*) Bryskett was a man much employed in Irish business. He had been Clerk to the Irish Council, had been a correspondent of Burghley and Walsingham, and had aspired to be Secretary of State when Fenton obtained the post: possibly in disappointment, he had retired, with an office which he exercised by deputy, to his lands in Wexford. He was a poet, and a friend of Spenser's: and it may have been by his interest with the dispensers of patronage, that "one Spenser," who had been his deputy, succeeded to his office.

In this position Spenser was brought into communication with the powerful English chiefs on the Council of Munster, and also with the leading men among the Undertakers as they were called, among whom more than half a million of acres of the escheated and desolate lands of the fallen Desmond were to be divided, on condition of each Undertaker settling on his estate a proportionate number of English gentlemen, yeomen, artisans and labourers with their families, who were to bring the ruined province into order and cultivation. The President and Vice-President of the Council were the two Norreys, John and Thomas, two of the most gallant of a gallant family. The project for the planting of Munster had been originally started before the rebellion, in

1568. It had been one of the causes of the rebellion; but now that Desmond was fallen, it was revived. It had been received in England with favour and hope. Men of influence and enterprise, Sir Christopher Hatton, Walsingham, Walter Ralegh, had embarked in it: and the government had made an appeal to the English country gentlemen to take advantage of this new opening for their younger sons, and to send them over at the head of colonies from the families of their tenants and dependants, to occupy a rich and beautiful land on easy terms of rent. In the Western Counties, north and south, the appeal had awakened interest. In the list of Undertakers are found Cheshire and Lancashire names, Stanley, Fleetwood, Molyneux: and a still larger number for Somerset, Devon, and Dorset, Popham, Rogers, Coles, Ralegh, Chudleigh, Champernown. The plan of settlement was carefully and methodically traced out. The province was surveyed as well as it could be under great difficulties. Maps were made which Lord Burghley annotated. "Seignories" were created of varying size, 12,000, 8000, 6000, 4000 acres, with corresponding obligations as to the number and class of farms and inhabitants in each. Legal science in England was to protect titles by lengthy patents and leases; administrative watchfulness and firmness were to secure them in Ireland. Privileges of trade were granted to the Undertakers: they were even allowed to transport coin out of England to Ireland: and a long respite was granted them before the Crown was to claim its rents. Strict rules were laid down to keep the native Irish out of the English lands and from intermarrying with the English families. In this partition, Seignories were distributed by the Undertakers among themselves with the free careless-

ness of men dividing the spoil. The great people, like Hatton and Ralegh, were to have their two or three Seignories: the county of Cork with its nineteen Seignories is assigned to the gentleman undertakers from Somersetshire. The plan was an ambitious and tempting one. But difficulties soon arose. The gentleman undertakers were not in a hurry to leave England even on a visit to their desolate and dangerous seignories in Munster. The "planting" did not thrive. The Irish were inexhaustible in raising legal obstacles and in giving practical annoyance. Claims and titles were hard to discover or to extinguish. Even the very attainted and escheated lands were challenged by virtue of settlements made before the attainders. The result was that a certain number of Irish estates were added to the possessions of a certain number of English families. But Munster was not planted. Burghley's policy, and Walsingham's resolution, and Ralegh's daring inventiveness were alike baffled by the conditions of a problem harder than the peopling of America or the conquest of India. Munster could not be made English. After all its desolation, it reverted in the main to its Irish possessors.

Of all the schemes and efforts which accompanied the attempt, and the records of which fill the Irish State papers of those years, Spenser was the near and close spectator. He was in Dublin and on the spot, as Clerk of the Council of Munster. And he had become acquainted, perhaps, by this time, had formed a friendship, with Walter Ralegh, one of the most active men in Irish business, whose influence was rising wherever he was becoming known. Most of the knowledge which Spenser thus gathered, and of the impressions which a practical hand-

ling of Irish affairs had left on him, was embodied in his interesting work, written several years later—*A View of the present State of Ireland*. But his connexion with Munster not unnaturally brought him also an accession of fortune. When Ralegh and the "Somersetshire men" were dividing among them the County of Cork, the Clerk of the Council was remembered by some of his friends. He was admitted among the Undertakers. His name appears in the list, among great statesmen and captains with their seignories of 12,000 acres, as holding a grant of some 3000. It was the manor and castle of Kilcolman, a ruined house of the Desmonds, under the Galtee Hills. It appears to have been first assigned to another person.[5] But it came at last into Spenser's hands, probably in 1586; and henceforward, this was his abode and his home.

Kilcolman Castle was near the high road between Mallow and Limerick, about three miles from Buttevant and Doneraile, in a plain at the foot of the last western falls of the Galtee range, watered by a stream now called the Awbeg, but which he celebrates under the name of the Mulla. In Spenser's time it was probably surrounded with woods. The earlier writers describe it as a pleasant abode with fine views, and so Spenser celebrated its natural beauties. The more recent accounts are not so favourable. "Kilcolman," says the writer in Murray's Handbook, "is a small peel tower, with cramped and dark rooms, a form which every gentleman's house assumed in turbulent times. It is situated on the margin of a small lake, and, it must be confessed, overlooking an extremely dreary tract of country." It was in the immediate neigh-

[5] Carew MSS. Calendar, 1587, p. 449. Cf. Irish Papers; Calendar, 1587, p. 309, 450.

bourhood of the wild country to the north, half forest, half bog, the wood and hill of Aharlo, or Arlo, as Spenser writes it, which was the refuge and the "great fastness" of the Desmond rebellion. It was amid such scenes, amid such occupations, in such society and companionship, that the poet of the *Faery Queen* accomplished as much of his work as was given him to do. In one of his later poems, he thus contrasts the peace of England with his own home :—

> No wayling there nor wretchednesse is heard,
> No bloodie issues nor no leprosies,
> No griesly famine, nor no raging sweard,
> No nightly bordrags [= border ravage], nor no hue and cries;
> The shepheards there abroad may safely lie,
> On hills and downes, withouten dread or daunger:
> No ravenous wolves the good mans hope destroy,
> Nor outlawes fell affray the forest raunger.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAERY QUEEN—THE FIRST PART.

[1580—1590.]

THE *Faery Queen* is heard of very early in Spenser's literary course. We know that in the beginning of 1580, the year in which Spenser went to Ireland, something under that title had been already begun and submitted to Gabriel Harvey's judgment; and that among other literary projects, Spenser was intending to proceed with it. But beyond the mere name, we know nothing, at this time, of Spenser's proposed *Faery Queen*. Harvey's criticisms on it tell us nothing of its general plan or its numbers. Whether the first sketch had been decided upon, whether the new stanza, Spenser's original creation, and its peculiar beauty and instrument, had yet been invented by him, while he had been trying experiments in metre in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, we have no means of determining. But he took the idea with him to Ireland; and in Ireland he pursued it and carried it out.

The first authentic account which we have of the composition of the *Faery Queen*, is in a pamphlet written by Spenser's friend and predecessor in the service of the Council of Munster, Ludowick Bryskett, and inscribed to Lord Grey of Wilton: a *Discourse of Civil Life*, published in 1606. He describes a meeting of friends at his

cottage near Dublin, and a conversation that took place on the "ethical" part of moral philosophy. The company consisted of some of the principal Englishmen employed in Irish affairs, men whose names occur continually in the copious correspondence in the Rolls and at Lambeth. There was Long, the Primate of Armagh; there were Sir Robert Dillon, the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and Dormer, the Queen's Solicitor; and there were soldiers, like Thomas Norreys, then Vice-President of Munster, under his brother John Norreys; Sir Warham Sentleger, on whom had fallen so much of the work in the South of Ireland, and who at last, like Thomas Norreys, fell in Tyrone's rebellion; Captain Christopher Carleil, Walsingham's son-in-law, a man who had gained great distinction on land and sea, not only in Ireland, but in the Low Countries, in France, and at Carthagena and San Domingo; and Captain Nicholas Dawtry, the Seneschal of Clandeboy, in the troublesome Ulster country, afterwards "Captain" of Hampshire at the time of the Armada. It was a remarkable party. The date of this meeting must have been after the summer of 1584, at which time Long was made Primate, and before the beginning of 1588, when Dawtry was in Hampshire. The extract is so curious, as a picture of the intellectual and literary wants and efforts of the times, especially amid the disorders of Ireland, and as a statement of Spenser's purpose in his poem, that an extract from it deserves to be inserted, as it is given in Mr. Todd's *Life of Spenser*, and repeated in that by Mr. Hales.

"Herein do I greatly envie," writes Bryskett, "the happiness of the Italians, who have in their mother-tongue late writers that have, with a singular easie method taught all that Plato

and Aristotle have confusedly or obscurely left written. Of which, some I have begun to reade with no small delight; as Alexander Piccolomini, Gio. Baptista Giraldi, and Guazzo; all three having written upon the Ethick part of Morall Philosophie both exactly and perspicuously. And would God that some of our countrimen would shew themselves so wel affected to the good of their countrie (whereof one principall and most important part consisteth in the instructing men to vertue), as to set downe in English the precepts of those parts of Morall Philosophy, whereby our youth might, without spending so much time as the learning of those other languages require, speedily enter into the right course of vertuous life.

"In the meane while I must struggle with those bookes which I vnderstand and content myselfe to plod upon them, in hope that God (who knoweth the sincerenesse of my desire) will be pleased to open my vnderstanding, so as I may reape that profit of my reading, which I trauell for. Yet is there *a gentleman in this company*, whom I have had often a purpose to intreate, that as his liesure might serue him, he would vouchsafe to spend some time with me to instruct me in some hard points which I cannot of myselfe understand; *knowing him to be not onely perfect in the Greek tongue, but also very well read in Philosophie, both morall and naturall.* Neuertheless such is my bashfulness, as I neuer yet durst open my mouth to disclose this my desire unto him, though I have not wanted some hartning thereunto from himselfe. For of loue and kindnes to me, *he encouraged me long sithens to follow the reading of the Greeke tongue, and offered me his helpe to make me vnderstand it.* But now that so good an opportunitie is offered vnto me, to satisfie in some sort my desire; I thinke I should commit a great fault, not to myselfe alone, but to all this company, if I should not enter my request thus farre, as to moue him to spend this time which we have now destined to familiar discourse and conuersation, in declaring unto us the great benefits which men obtaine by the knowledge of Morall Philosophie, and in making us to know what the same is, what be the parts thereof, whereby vertues are to be distinguished from vices; and finally that he will be pleased to run ouer in

such order as he shall thinke good, such and so many principles and rules thereof, as shall serue not only for my better instruction, but also for the contentment and satisfaction of you al. For I nothing doubt, but that euery one of you will be glad to heare so profitable a discourse and thinke the time very wel spent wherin so excellent a knowledge shal be reuealed unto you, from which euery one may be assured to gather some fruit as wel as myselfe.

Therefore (said I), turning myselfe to *M. Spenser*, It is you sir, to whom it pertaineth to shew yourselfe courteous now unto vs all and to make vs all beholding unto you for the pleasure and profit which we shall gather from your speeches, if you shall vouchsafe to open unto vs the goodly cabinet, in which this excellent treasure of vertues lieth locked up from the vulgar sort. And thereof in the behalfe of all as for myselfe, I do most earnestly intreate you not to say vs nay. Vnto which wordes of mine euery man applauding most with like words of request and the rest with gesture and countenances expressing as much, *M. Spenser* answered in this maner:

Though it may seeme hard for me, to refuse the request made by you all, whom euery one alone, I should for many respects be willing to gratifie; yet as the case standeth, I doubt not but with the consent of the most part of you, I shall be excused at this time of this taske which would be laid vpon me; for sure I am, that it is not vnknowne unto you, that I haue alreedy vndertaken a work tending to the same effect, which is in *heroical verse* under the title of a *Faerie Queene* to represent all the moral vertues, assigning to euery vertue a Knight to be the patron and defender of the same, in whose actions and feates of arms and chiualry the operations of that vertue, whereof he is the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten down and ouercome. Which work, *as I haue already well entred into*, if God shall please to spare me life that I may finish it according to my mind, your wish (*M. Brysket*) will be in some sort accomplished, though perhaps not so effectually as you could desire. And the same may very well serue for my excuse, if at this time I craue to be forborne

in this your request, since any discourse, that I might make thus on the sudden in such a subject would be but simple, and little to your satisfactions. For it would require good aduisement and premeditation for any man to vndertake the declaration of these points that you have proposed, containing in effect the Ethicke part of Morall Philosophie. Whereof since I haue taken in hand to discourse at large in my poeme before spoken, I hope the expectation of that work may serue to free me at this time from speaking in that matter, notwithstanding your motion and all your intreaties. But I will tell you how I thinke by himselfe he may very well excuse my speech, and yet satisfie all you in this matter. I haue seene (as he knoweth) a translation made by himselfe out of the Italian tongue of a dialogue comprehending all the Ethick part of Moral Philosophy written by one of those three he formerly mentioned, and that is by *Giraldi* vnder the title of a Dialogue of Ciuil life. If it please him to bring us forth that translation to be here read among vs, or otherwise to deliuer to us, as his memory may serue him, the contents of the same; he shal (I warrant you) satisfie you all at the ful, and himselfe wil haue no cause but to thinke the time well spent in reuiewing his labors, especially in the company of so many his friends, who may thereby reape much profit, and the translation happily fare the better by some mending it may receiue in the perusing, as all writings else may do by the often examination of the same. Neither let it trouble him that I so turne ouer to him againe the taske he wold haue put me to; for it falleth out fit for him to verifie the principall of all this Apologie, euen now made for himselfe; because thereby it will appeare that he hath not withdrawne himselfe from seruice of the state to liue idle or wholly priuate to himselfe, but hath spent some time in doing that which may greatly benefit others, and hath serued not a little to the bettering of his owne mind, and increasing of his knowledge; though he for modesty pretend much ignorance, and pleade want in wealth, much like some rich beggars, who either of custom, or for couetousnes, go to begge of others those things whereof they haue no want at home.

With this answer of *M. Spensers* it seemed that all the

company were wel satisfied, for after some few speeches whereby they had shewed an extreme longing after his worke of the *Fairie Queene, whereof some parcels had been by some of them seene*, they all began to presse me to produce my translation mentioned by *M. Spenser* that it might be perused among them; or else that I should (as near as I could) deliuer unto them the contents of the same, supposing that my memory would not much faile me in a thing so studied and advisedly set downe in writing as a translation must be."

A poet at this time still had to justify his employment by presenting himself in the character of a professed teacher of morality, with a purpose as definite and formal, though with a different method, as the preacher in the pulpit. Even with this profession, he had to encounter many prejudices, and men of gravity and wisdom shook their heads at what they thought his idle trifling. But if he wished to be counted respectable, and to separate himself from the crowd of foolish or licentious rimers, he must intend distinctly, not merely to interest, but to instruct, by his new and deep conceits. It was under the influence of this persuasion that Spenser laid down the plan of the *Faery Queen*. It was, so he proposed to himself, to be a work on moral, and if time were given him, political philosophy, composed with as serious a didactic aim, as any treatise or sermon in prose. He deems it necessary to explain and excuse his work by claiming for it this design. He did not venture to send the *Faery Queen* into the world without also telling the world its moral meaning and bearing. He cannot trust it to tell its own story or suggest its real drift. In the letter to Sir W. Ralegh, accompanying the first portion of it, he unfolds elaborately the sense of his allegory, as he expounded it to his friends in Dublin. "To some," he says,

"I know this method will seem displeasant, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly by way of precept, or sermoned at large, as they use, than thus cloudily enwrapped in allegorical devises." He thought that Homer and Virgil and Ariosto had thus written poetry, to teach the world moral virtue and political wisdom. He attempted to propitiate Lord Burghley, who hated him and his verses, by setting before him in a dedication sonnet, the true intent of his—

> Idle rimes;
> The labour of lost time and wit unstaid;
> Yet if their deeper sense he inly weighed,
> And the dim veil, with which from common view
> Their fairer parts are hid, aside be laid,
> Perhaps not vain they may appear to you.

In earlier and in later times, men do not apologize for being poets; and Spenser himself was deceived in giving himself credit for this direct purpose to instruct, when he was really following the course marked out by his genius. But he only conformed to the curious utilitarian spirit which pervaded the literature of the time. Readers were supposed to look everywhere for a moral to be drawn, or a lesson to be inculcated, or some practical rules to be avowedly and definitely deduced; and they could not yet take in the idea that the exercise of the speculative and imaginative faculties may be its own end, and may have indirect influences and utilities even greater than if it was guided by a conscious intention to be edifying and instructive.

The first great English poem of modern times, the first creation of English imaginative power since Chaucer, and like Chaucer so thoroughly and characteristically English, was not written in England. Whatever Spenser may have

done to it before he left England with Lord Grey, and whatever portions of earlier composition may have been used and worked up into the poem as it went on, the bulk of the *Faery Queen*, as we have it, was composed in what to Spenser and his friends was almost a foreign land —in the conquered and desolated wastes of wild and barbarous Ireland. It is a feature of his work on which Spenser himself dwells. In the verses which usher in his poem, addressed to the great men of Elizabeth's court, he presents his work to the Earl of Ormond, as

> The wild fruit which salvage soil hath bred;
> Which being through long wars left almost waste,
> With brutish barbarism is overspread;—

and in the same strain to Lord Grey, he speaks of his "rude rimes, the which a rustic muse did weave, in salvage soil." It is idle to speculate what difference of form the *Faery Queen* might have received, if the design had been carried out in the peace of England and in the society of London. But it is certain that the scene of trouble and danger in which it grew up greatly affected it. This may possibly account, though it is questionable, for the looseness of texture, and the want of accuracy and finish which is sometimes to be seen in it. Spenser was a learned poet; and his poem has the character of the work of a man of wide reading, but without books to verify or correct. It cannot be doubted that his life in Ireland added to the force and vividness with which Spenser wrote. In Ireland, he had before his eyes continually, the dreary world which the poet of knight errantry imagines. There men might in good truth travel long through wildernesses and "great woods" given over to the outlaw and the ruffian. There the avenger

of wrong need seldom want for perilous adventure and the occasion for quelling the oppressor. There the armed and unrelenting hand of right was but too truly the only substitute for law. There might be found in most certain and prosaic reality, the ambushes, the disguises, the treacheries, the deceits and temptations, even the supposed witchcrafts and enchantments, against which the fairy champions of the virtues have to be on their guard. In Ireland, Englishmen saw, or at any rate thought they saw, a universal conspiracy of fraud against righteousness, a universal battle going on between error and religion, between justice and the most insolent selfishness. They found there every type of what was cruel, brutal, loathsome. They saw everywhere men whose business it was to betray and destroy, women whose business it was to tempt and ensnare and corrupt. They thought that they saw too, in those who waged the Queen's wars, all forms of manly and devoted gallantry, of noble generosity, of gentle strength, of knightly sweetness and courtesy. There were those, too, who failed in the hour of trial; who were the victims of temptation or of the victorious strength of evil. Besides the open or concealed traitors, the Desmonds, and Kildares, and O'Neales, there were the men who were entrapped and overcome, and the men who disappointed hopes, and became recreants to their faith and loyalty; like Sir William Stanley, who, after a brilliant career in Ireland, turned traitor and apostate, and gave up Deventer and his Irish bands to the King of Spain.

The realities of the Irish wars and of Irish social and political life gave a real subject, gave body and form to the allegory. There in actual flesh and blood were enemies to be fought with by the good and true. There

in visible fact were the vices and falsehoods, which Arthur and his companions were to quell and punish. There in living truth were *Sansfoy*, and *Sansloy*, and *Sansjoy;* there were *Orgoglio* and *Grantorto*, the witcheries of *Acrasia* and *Phædria*, the insolence of *Briana* and *Crudor*. And there, too, were real Knights of goodness and the Gospel—Grey, and Ormond, and Ralegh, the Norreyses, St. Leger, and Maltby—on a real mission from Gloriana's noble realm to destroy the enemies of truth and virtue.

The allegory bodies forth the trials which beset the life of man in all conditions and at all times. But Spenser could never have seen in England such a strong and perfect image of the allegory itself—with the wild wanderings of its personages, its daily chances of battle and danger, its hairbreadth escapes, its strange encounters, its prevailing anarchy and violence, its normal absence of order and law—as he had continually and customarily before him in Ireland. "The curse of God was so great," writes John Hooker, a contemporary, "and the land so barren both of man and beast, that whosoever did travel from one end to the other of all Munster, even from Waterford to Smerwick, about six score miles, he should not meet man, woman, or child, saving in cities or towns, nor yet see any beast, save foxes, wolves or other ravening beasts." It is the desolation through which Spenser's knights pursue their solitary way, or join company as they can. Indeed to read the same writer's account, for instance, of Ralegh's adventures with the Irish chieftains, his challenges and single combats, his escapes at fords and woods, is like reading bits of the *Faery Queen* in prose. As Spenser chose to write of knight errantry, his picture of it has doubtless gained in truth and strength by his very practical experience of

what such life as he describes must be. The *Faery Queen* might almost be called the Epic of the English wars in Ireland under Elizabeth, as much as the Epic of English virtue and valour at the same period.

At the Dublin meeting described by Bryskett, some time later than 1584, Spenser had already "well entered into" his work. In 1589, he came to England, bringing with him the first three books; and early in 1590, they were published. Spenser himself has told us the story of this first appearance of the *Faery Queen*. The person who discovered the extraordinary work of genius which was growing up amid the turbulence and misery and despair of Ireland, and who once more brought its author into the centre of English life, was Walter Ralegh. Ralegh had served through much of the Munster war. He had shown in Ireland some of the characteristic points of his nature, which made him at once the glory and shame of English manhood. He had begun to take a prominent place in any business in which he engaged. He had shown his audacity, his self-reliance, his resource, and some signs of that boundless but prudent ambition which marked his career. He had shown that freedom of tongue, that restless and high-reaching inventiveness, and that tenacity of opinion, which made him a difficult person for others to work with. Like so many of the English captains, he hated Ormond, and saw in his feud with the Desmonds the real cause of the hopeless disorder of Munster. But also he incurred the displeasure and suspicion of Lord Grey, who equally disliked the great Irish Chief, but who saw in the "plot" which Ralegh sent to Burghley for the pacification of Munster, an adventurer's impracticable and self-seeking scheme. "I must be plain," he writes, "I like neither his carriage

nor his company." Ralegh had been at Smerwick: he had been in command of one of the bands put in by Lord Grey to do the execution. On Lord Grey's departure he had become one of the leading persons among the undertakers for the planting of Munster. He had secured for himself a large share of the Desmond lands. In 1587, an agreement among the undertakers assigned to Sir Walter Ralegh, his associates and tenants, three seignories of 12,000 acres a-piece, and one of 6000, in Cork and Waterford. But before Lord Grey's departure, Ralegh had left Ireland, and had found the true field for his ambition in the English court. From 1582 to 1589, he had shared with Leicester and Hatton and afterwards with Essex, the special favour of the Queen. He had become Warden of the Stannaries and Captain of the Guard. He had undertaken the adventure of founding a new realm in America under the name of Virginia. He had obtained grants of monopolies, farms of wines, Babington's forfeited estates. His own great ship, which he had built, the Ark Ralegh, had carried the flag of the High Admiral of England in the glorious but terrible summer of 1588. He joined in that tremendous sea-chase from Plymouth to the North Sea, when, as Spenser wrote to Lord Howard of Effingham—

> Those huge castles of Castilian King,
> That vainly threatened kingdoms to displace,
> Like flying doves, ye did before you chase.

In the summer of 1589, Ralegh had been busy, as men of the sea were then, half Queen's servants, half buccaneers, in gathering the abundant spoils to be found on the high seas; and he had been with Sir John Norreys and Sir Francis Drake in a bootless but not unprofitable expe-

dition to Lisbon. On his return from the Portugal voyage his court fortunes underwent a change. Essex, who had long scorned "that knave Ralegh," was in the ascendant. Ralegh found the Queen, for some reason or another, and reasons were not hard to find, offended and dangerous. He bent before the storm. In the end of the summer of 1589, he was in Ireland, looking after his large seignories, his law-suits with the old proprietors, his castle at Lismore, and his schemes for turning to account his woods for the manufacture of pipe staves for the French and Spanish wine trade.

He visited Spenser, who was his neighbour, at Kilcolman, and the visit led to important consequences. The record of it and of the events which followed, is preserved in a curious poem of Spenser's written two or three years later, and of much interest in regard to Spenser's personal history. Taking up the old pastoral form of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, with the familiar rustic names of the swains who figured in its dialogues,—Hobbinol, Cuddie, Rosalind, and his own Colin Clout,—he described under the usual poetical disguise, the circumstances which once more took him back from Ireland to the court. The court was the place to which all persons wishing to push their way in the world were attracted. It was not only the centre of all power, the source of favours and honours, the seat of all that swayed the destiny of the nation. It was the home of refinement, and wit, and cultivation, the place where eminence of all kinds was supposed to be collected, and to which all ambitions, literary as much as political, aspired. It was not only a royal court; it was also a great club. Spenser's poem shows us how he had sped there, and the impressions made on his mind by a closer view of the persons and the ways

of that awful and dazzling scene, which exercised such a spell upon Englishmen, and which seemed to combine or concentrate in itself the glory and the goodness of heaven, and all the baseness and malignity of earth. The occasion deserved a full celebration; it was indeed a turning-point in his life, for it led to the publication of the *Faery Queen*, and to the immediate and enthusiastic recognition by the Englishmen of the time of his unrivalled pre-eminence as a poet. In this poetical record, *Colin Clout's come home again*, containing in it history, criticism, satire, personal recollections, love passages, we have the picture of his recollections of the flush and excitement of those months which saw the first appearance of the *Faery Queen*. He describes the interruption of his retired and, as he paints it, peaceful and pastoral life in his Irish home, by the appearance of Ralegh, the "Shepherd of the Ocean," from "the main sea deep." They may have been thrown together before. Both had been patronized by Leicester. Both had been together at Smerwick, and probably in other passages of the Munster war; both had served under Lord Grey, Spenser's master, though he had been no lover of Ralegh. In their different degrees, Ralegh with his two or three Seignories of half a county, and Spenser with his more modest estate, they were embarked in the same enterprise, the plantation of Munster. But Ralegh now appeared before Spenser in all the glory of a brilliant favourite, the soldier, the explorer, the daring sea-captain, the founder of plantations across the ocean, and withal, the poet, the ready and eloquent discourser, the true judge and measurer of what was great or beautiful.

The time, too, was one at once of excitement and repose. Men felt as they feel after a great peril, a great effort, a great relief; as the Greeks did after Salamis and Platæa,

as our fathers did after Waterloo. In the struggle in the Channel with the might of Spain, England had recognized its force and its prospects. One of those solemn moments had just passed when men see before them the course of the world turned one way, when it might have been turned another. All the world had been looking out to see what would come to pass; and nowhere more eagerly than in Ireland. Every one, English and Irish alike, stood agaze to "see how the game would be played." The great fleet, as it drew near, "worked wonderfully uncertain yet calm humours in the people, not daring to disclose their real intention." When all was decided, and the distressed ships were cast away on the western coast, the Irish showed as much zeal as the English in fulfilling the orders of the Irish council, to "apprehend and execute all Spaniards found there of what quality soever." These were the impressions under which the two men met. Ralegh, at the moment, was under a cloud. In the poetical fancy picture set before us—

> His song was all a lamentable lay
> Of great unkindnesse, and of usage hard,
> Of Cynthia the Ladie of the Sea,
> Which from her presence faultlesse him debard.
> And ever and anon, with singults rife,
> He cryed out, to make his undersong;
> Ah! my loves queene, and goddesse of my life,
> Who shall me pittie, when thou doest me wrong?

At Kilcolman, Ralegh became acquainted with what Spenser had done of the *Faery Queen*. His rapid and clear judgment showed him how immeasurably it rose above all that had yet been produced under the name of poetry in England. That alone is sufficient to account for his eager desire that it should be known in England. But Ralegh always had an eye to his own affairs, marred

as they so often were by ill-fortune and his own mistakes; and he may have thought of making his peace with Cynthia, by reintroducing at Court the friend of Philip Sidney, now ripened into a poet not unworthy of Gloriana's greatness. This is Colin Clout's account:—

> When thus our pipes we both had wearied well,
> (Quoth he) and each an end of singing made,
> He gan to cast great lyking to my lore,
> And great dislyking to my lucklesse lot,
> That banisht had my selfe, like wight forlore,
> Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.
> The which to leave, thenceforth he counseld mee,
> Unmeet for man, in whom was ought regardfull,
> And wend with him, his Cynthia to see:
> Whose grace was great, and bounty most rewardfull;
> Besides her peerlesse skill in making well,
> And all the ornaments of wondrous wit,
> Such as all womankynd did far excell,
> Such as the world admyr'd, and praised it.
> So what with hope of good, and hate of ill,
> He me perswaded forth with him to fare.
> Nought tooke I with me, but mine oaten quill:
> Small needments else need shepheard to prepare.
> So to the sea we came; the sea, that is
> A world of waters heaped up on hie,
> Rolling like mountaines in wide wildernesse,
> Horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse crie.

This is followed by a spirited description of a sea-voyage, and of that empire of the seas in which, since the overthrow of the Armada, England and England's mistress were now claiming to be supreme, and of which Ralegh was one of the most active and distinguished officers:—

> And yet as ghastly dreadfull, as it seemes,
> Bold men, presuming life for gaine to sell,
> Dare tempt that gulf, and in those wandring stremes
> Seek waies unknowne, waies leading down to hell.

For, as we stood there waiting on the strond,
Behold! an huge great vessell to us came,
Daunсing upon the waters back to lond,
As if it scornd the daunger of the same;
Yet was it but a wooden frame and fraile,
Glewed togither with some subtile matter.
Yet had it armes and wings, and head and taile,
And life to move it selfe upon the water.
Strange thing! how bold and swift the monster was,
That neither car'd for wind, nor haile, nor raine,
Nor swelling waves, but thorough them did passe
So proudly, that she made them roare againe.
The same aboord us gently did receave,
And without harme us farre away did beare,
So farre that land, our mother, us did leave,
And nought but sea and heaven to us appeare.
Then hartlesse quite, and full of inward feare,
That shepheard I besought to me to tell,
Under what skie, or in what world we were,
In which I saw no living people dwell.
Who, me recomforting all that he might,
Told me that that same was the Regiment
Of a great Shepheardesse, that Cynthia hight,
His liege, his Ladie, and his lifes Regent.

This is the poetical version of Ralegh's appreciation of the treasure which he had lighted on in Ireland, and of what he did to make it known to the admiration and delight of England. He returned to the Court, and Spenser with him. Again, for what reason we know not, he was received into favour. The poet, who accompanied him, was brought to the presence of the lady, who saw herself in "various mirrors,"—Cynthia, Gloriana, Belphœbe, as she heard him read portions of the great poem which was to add a new glory to her reign.

"The Shepheard of the Ocean (quoth he)
Unto that Goddesse grace me first enhanced,
And to mine oaten pipe enclin'd her eare,
That she thenceforth therein gan take delight;

And it desir'd at timely houres to heare,
All were my notes but rude and roughly dight;
For not by measure of her owne great mynde,
And wondrous worth, she mott my simple song,
But joyd that country shepheard ought could fynd
Worth harkening to, emongst the learned throng."

He had already too well caught the trick of flattery—flattery in a degree almost inconceivable to us—which the fashions of the time, and the Queen's strange self-deceit, exacted from the loyalty and enthusiasm of Englishmen. In that art Ralegh was only too apt a teacher. Colin Clout, in his story of his recollections of the Court, lets us see how he was taught to think and to speak there:—

But if I her like ought on earth might read,
I would her lyken to a crowne of lillies,
Upon a virgin brydes adorned head,
With Roses dight and Goolds and Daffadillies;
Or like the circlet of a Turtle true,
In which all colours of the rainbow bee;
Or like faire Phebes garlond shining new,
In which all pure perfection one may see.
But vaine it is to thinke, by paragone
Of earthly things, to judge of things divine:
Her power, her mercy, her wisdome, none
Can deeme, but who the Godhead can define.
Why then do I, base shepheard, bold and blind,
Presume the things so sacred to prophane?
More fit it is t' adore, with humble mind,
The image of the heavens in shape humane.

The Queen, who heard herself thus celebrated, celebrated not only as a semi-divine person, but as herself unrivalled in the art of "making" or poetry,—"her peerless skill in making well,"—granted Spenser a pension of 50*l.* a year, which, it is said, the prosaic and frugal Lord Treasurer, always hard-driven for money and not caring much for poets, made difficulties about paying. But the new

poem was not for the Queen's ear only. In the registers of the Stationers' Company occurs the following entry :—

Primo die Decembris [1589].

Mr. Ponsonbye—Entered for his Copye, a book intytuled the *fayrye Queene* dysposed into xij bookes &c., authorysed under thandes of the Archbishop of Canterbery and bothe the Wardens. vj$^{d.}$

Thus, between pamphlets of the hour,—an account of the Arms of the City Companies on one side, and the last news from France on the other,—the first of our great modern English poems was licensed to make its appearance. It appeared soon after, with the date of 1590. It was not the twelve books, but only the first three. It was accompanied and introduced, as usual, by a great host of commendatory and laudatory sonnets and poems. All the leading personages at Elizabeth's court were appealed to ; according to their several tastes or their relations to the poet, they are humbly asked to befriend, or excuse, or welcome his poetical venture. The list itself is worth quoting :—Sir Christopher Hatton, then Lord Chancellor, the Earls of Essex, Oxford, Northumberland, Ormond, Lord Howard of Effingham, Lord Grey of Wilton, Sir Walter Ralegh, Lord Burleigh, the Earl of Cumberland, Lord Hunsdon, Lord Buckhurst, Walsingham, Sir John Norris, President of Munster. He addresses Lady Pembroke, in remembrance of her brother, that "heroic spirit," "the glory of our days,"

> Who first my Muse did lift out of the floor,
> To sing his sweet delights in lowly lays.

And he finishes with a sonnet to Lady Carew, one of Sir John Spencer's daughters, and another to "all the gracious and beautiful ladies of the Court," in which "the world's

pride seems to be gathered." There come also congratulations and praises for himself. Ralegh addressed to him a fine but extravagant sonnet, in which he imagined Petrarch weeping for envy at the approval of the *Faery Queen*, while "Oblivion laid him down on Laura's hearse," and even Homer trembled for his fame. Gabriel Harvey revoked his judgment on the *Elvish Queen*, and not without some regret for less ambitious days in the past, cheered on his friend in his noble enterprise. Gabriel Harvey has been so much, and not without reason, laughed at, and yet his verses welcoming the *Faery Queen* are so full of true and warm friendship, and of unexpected refinement and grace, that it is but just to cite them. In the eyes of the world he was an absurd personage: but Spenser saw in him perhaps his worthiest and trustiest friend. A generous and simple affection has almost got the better in them of pedantry and false taste.

Collyn, I see, by thy new taken taske,
  Some sacred fury hath enricht thy braynes,
That leades thy muse in haughty verse to maske,
  And loath the layes that longs to lowly swaynes;
That lifts thy notes from Shepheardes unto kinges:
So like the lively Larke that mounting singes.

Thy lovely Rosolinde seemes now forlorne,
  And all thy gentle flockes forgotten quight:
Thy chaunged hart now holdes thy pypes in scorne,
  Those prety pypes that did thy mates delight;
Those trusty mates, that loved thee so well;
Whom thou gav'st mirth, as they gave thee the bell.

Yet, as thou earst with thy sweete roundelayes
  Didst stirre to glee our laddes in homely bowers;
So moughtst thou now in these refyned layes
  Delight the daintie eares of higher powers:
And so mought they, in their deepe skanning skill,
Alow and grace our Collyns flowing quyll.

And faire befall that *Faery Queene* of thine,
In whose faire eyes love linckt with vertue sittes;
Enfusing, by those bewties fyers devyne,
Such high conceites into thy humble wittes,
As raised hath poore pastors oaten reedes
From rustick tunes, to chaunt heroique deedes.

So mought thy *Redcrosse Knight* with happy hand
Victorious be in that faire Ilands right,
Which thou dost vayle in Type of Faery land,
Elizas blessed field, that *Albion* hight:
That shieldes her friendes, and warres her mightie foes,
Yet still with people, peace, and plentie flowes.

But (jolly shepheard) though with pleasing style
Thou feast the humour of the Courtly trayne,
Let not conceipt thy setled sence beguile,
Ne daunted be through envy or disdaine.
Subject thy dome to her Empyring spright,
From whence thy Muse, and all the world, takes light.

HOBYNOLL.

And to the Queen herself Spenser presented his work, in one of the boldest dedications perhaps ever penned:—

To
The Most High, Mightie, and Magnificent
Empresse,
Renowmed for piety, vertve, and all gratiovs government,
ELIZABETH,
By the Grace of God,
Qveene of England, Fravnce, and Ireland, and of Virginia,
Defendovr of the Faith, &c.
Her most hvmble Servavnt
EDMVND SPENSER,
Doth, in all hvmilitie,
Dedicate, present, and consecrate
These his labovrs,
To live with the eternitie of her fame.

"To live with the eternity of her fame,"—the claim was a proud one, but it has proved a prophecy. The pub-

lication of the *Faery Queen* placed him at once and for his lifetime at the head of all living English poets. The world of his day immediately acknowledged the charm and perfection of the new work of art which had taken it by surprise. As far as appears, it was welcomed heartily and generously. Spenser speaks in places of envy and detraction, and he, like others, had no doubt his rivals and enemies. But little trace of censure appears, except in the stories about Burghley's dislike of him, as an idle rimer, and perhaps as a friend of his opponents. But his brother poets, men like Lodge and Drayton, paid honour, though in quaint phrases, to the learned Colin, the reverend Colin, the excellent and cunning Colin. A greater than they, if we may trust his editors, takes him as the representative of poetry, which is so dear to him.

> If music and sweet poetry agree,
> As they must needs, the sister and the brother,
> Then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me,
> Because thou lov'st the one, and I the other.
> *Dowland* to thee is dear, whose heavenly touch
> Upon the lute doth ravish human sense;
> *Spenser* to me, whose deep conceit is such
> As passing all conceit, needs no defence.
> Thou lov'st to hear the sweet melodious sound
> That Phœbus' lute, the queen of music, makes;
> And I in deep delight am chiefly drown'd
> Whenas himself to singing he betakes.
> One god is god of both, as poets feign;
> One knight loves both, and both in thee remain.
>
> (*Shakespere*, in the *Passionate Pilgrim*, 1599.)

Even the fierce pamphleteer, Thomas Nash, the scourge and torment of poor Gabriel Harvey, addresses Harvey's friend as heavenly Spenser, and extols "the Faery Singers' stately tuned verse." Spenser's title to be the

"Poet of poets," was at once acknowledged as by acclamation. And he himself has no difficulty in accepting his position. In some lines on the death of a friend's wife, whom he laments and praises, the idea presents itself that the great queen may not approve of her Shepherd wasting his lays on meaner persons; and he puts into his friend's mouth a deprecation of her possible jealousy. The lines are characteristic, both in their beauty and music, and in the strangeness, in our eyes, of the excuse made for the poet.

> Ne let Eliza, royall Shepheardesse,
> The praises of my parted love envy,
> For she hath praises in all plenteousnesse
> Powr'd upon her, like showers of Castaly,
> By her own Shepheard, Colin, her owne Shepheard,
> That her with heavenly hymnes doth deifie,
> Of rustick muse full hardly to be betterd.
>
> She is the Rose, the glorie of the day,
> And mine the Primrose in the lowly shade:
> Mine, ah! not mine; amisse I mine did say:
> Not mine, but His, which mine awhile her made;
> Mine to be His, with him to live for ay.
> O that so faire a flower so soone should fade,
> And through untimely tempest fall away!
>
> She fell away in her first ages spring,
> Whil'st yet her leafe was greene, and fresh her rinde,
> And whilst her braunch faire blossomes foorth did bring,
> She fell away against all course of kinde.
> For age to dye is right, but youth is wrong;
> She fel away like fruit blowne downe with winde.
> Weepe, Shepheard! weepe, to make my undersong.

Thus in both his literary enterprises, Spenser had been signally successful. The *Shepherd's Calendar* in 1580 had immediately raised high hopes of his powers. The *Faery Queen* in 1590 had more than fulfilled them. In the interval a considerable change had happened in English

cultivation. Shakespere had come to London, though the world did not yet know all that he was. Sidney had published his *Defense of Poesie*, and had written the *Arcadia*, though it was not yet published. Marlowe had begun to write, and others beside him were preparing the change which was to come on the English Drama. Two scholars who had shared with Spenser in the bounty of Robert Nowell were beginning, in different lines, to raise the level of thought and style. Hooker was beginning to give dignity to controversy, and to show what English prose might rise to. Lancelot Andrewes, Spenser's junior at school and college, was training himself at St. Paul's, to lead the way to a larger and higher kind of preaching than the English clergy had yet reached. The change of scene from Ireland to the centre of English interests, must have been, as Spenser describes it, very impressive. England was alive with aspiration and effort; imaginations were inflamed and hearts stirred by the deeds of men who described with the same energy with which they acted. Amid such influences, and with such a friend as Ralegh, Spenser may naturally have been tempted by some of the dreams of advancement of which Ralegh's soul was full. There is strong probability, from the language of his later poems, that he indulged such hopes, and that they were disappointed. A year after the entry in the Stationers' Register of the *Faery Queen* (29 Dec., 1590), Ponsonby, his publisher, entered a volume of "*Complaints, containing sundry small poems of the World's Vanity*," to which he prefixed the following notice.

THE PRINTER TO THE GENTLE READER.

SINCE my late setting foorth of the *Faerie Queene*, finding that it hath found a favourable passage amongst you, I have sithence

endevoured by all good meanes (for the better encrease and accomplishment of your delights,) to get into my handes such smale Poemes of the same Authors, as I heard were disperst abroad in sundrie hands, and not easie to bee come by, by himselfe; some of them having bene diverslie imbeziled and purloyned from him since his departure over Sea. Of the which I have, by good meanes, gathered togeather these fewe parcels present, which I have caused to bee imprinted altogeather, for that they al seeme to containe like matter of argument in them; being all complaints and meditations of the worlds vanitie, verie grave and profitable. To which effect I understand that he besides wrote sundrie others, namelie *Ecclesiastes* and *Canticum canticorum* translated, *A senights slumber*, *The hell of lovers*, *his Purgatorie*, being all dedicated to Ladies; so as it may seeme he ment them all to one volume. Besides some other Pamphlets looselie scattered abroad. as *The dying Pellican*, *The howers of the Lord*, *The sacrifice of a sinner*, *The seven Psalmes*, &c., which when I can, either by himselfe or otherwise, attaine too, I meane likewise for your favour sake to set foorth. In the meane time, praying you gentlie to accept of these, and graciouslie to entertaine the new Poet, *I take leave.*

The collection is a miscellaneous one, both as to subjects and date: it contains among other things, the translations from Petrarch and Du Bellay, which had appeared in Vander Noodt's *Theatre of Worldlings*, in 1569. But there are also some pieces of later date; and they disclose not only personal sorrows and griefs, but also an experience which had ended in disgust and disappointment. In spite of Ralegh's friendship, he had found that in the Court he was not likely to thrive. The two powerful men who had been his earliest friends had disappeared. Philip Sidney had died in 1586; Leicester, soon after the destruction of the Armada, in 1588. And they had been followed (April, 1590) by Sidney's powerful father-in-law, Francis Walsingham. The death of Leicester, untended,

unlamented, powerfully impressed Spenser, always keenly alive to the pathetic vicissitudes of human greatness. In one of these pieces, *The Ruins of Time*, addressed to Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, Spenser thus imagines the death of Leicester,—

> It is not long, since these two eyes beheld
> A mightie Prince, of most renowmed race,
> Whom England high in count of honour held,
> And greatest ones did sue to gaine his grace;
> Of greatest ones he, greatest in his place,
> Sate in the bosome of his Soveraine,
> And *Right and loyall* did his word maintaine.
>
> I saw him die, I saw him die, as one
> Of the meane people, and brought foorth on beare;
> I saw him die, and no man left to mone
> His dolefull fate, that late him loved deare:
> Scarse anie left to close his eylids neare;
> Scarse anie left upon his lips to laie
> The sacred sod, or Requiem to saie.
>
> O! trustless state of miserable men,
> That builde your blis on hope of earthly thing,
> And vainlie thinke your selves halfe happie then,
> When painted faces with smooth flattering
> Doo fawne on you, and your wide praises sing;
> And, when the courting masker louteth lowe,
> Him true in heart and trustie to you trow.

For Sidney, the darling of the time, who had been to him not merely a cordial friend, but the realized type of all that was glorious in manhood, and beautiful in character and gifts, his mourning was more than that of a looker-on at a moving instance of the frailty of greatness. It was the poet's sorrow for the poet, who had almost been to him what the elder brother is to the younger. Both now, and in later years, his affection for one who was become to him a glorified saint, showed itself in deep and

genuine expression, through the affectations which crowned the "herse" of Astrophel and Philisides. He was persuaded that Sidney's death had been a grave blow to literature and learning. The *Ruins of Time*, and still more the *Tears of the Muses*, are full of lamentations over returning barbarism and ignorance, and the slight account made by those in power of the gifts and the arts of the writer, the poet, and the dramatist. Under what was popularly thought the crabbed and parsimonious administration of Burghley, and with the churlishness of the Puritans, whom he was supposed to foster, it seemed as if the poetry of the time was passing away in chill discouragement. The effect is described in lines which, as we now naturally suppose, and Dryden also thought, can refer to no one but Shakespere. But it seems doubtful whether all this could have been said of Shakespere in 1590. It seems more likely that this also is an extravagant compliment to Philip Sidney, and his masking performances. He was lamented elsewhere under the poetical name of *Willy*. If it refers to him, it was probably written before his death, though not published till after it; for the lines imply, not that he is literally dead, but that he is in retirement. The expression that he is "dead of late," is explained in four lines below, as "choosing to sit in idle cell," and is one of Spenser's common figures for inactivity or sorrow.[1]

The verses are the lamentations of the Muse of Comedy.

THALIA.

Where be the sweete delights of learning's treasure
That wont with Comick sock to beautefie
The painted Theaters, and fill with pleasure
The listners eyes and eares with melodie;

[1] *v. Colin Clout*, l. 31. *Astrophel*, l. 175.

In which I late was wont to raine as Queene,
And maske in mirth with Graces well beseene?

O! all is gone; and all that goodly glee,
Which wont to be the glorie of gay wits,
Is layed abed, and no where now to see;
And in her roome unseemly Sorrow sits,
With hollow browes and greisly countenaunce,
Marring my joyous gentle dalliaunce.

And him beside sits ugly Barbarisme,
And brutish Ignorance, ycrept of late
Out of dredd darknes of the deepe Abysme,
Where being bredd, he light and heaven does hate:
They in the mindes of men now tyrannize,
And the faire Scene with rudenes foule disguize.

All places they with follie have possest,
And with vaine toyes the vulgare entertaine;
But me have banished, with all the rest
That whilome wont to wait upon my traine,
Fine Counterfesaunce, and unhurtfull Sport,
Delight, and Laughter, deckt in seemly sort.

All these, and all that els the Comick Stage
With seasoned wit and goodly pleasance graced,
By which mans life in his likest image
Was limned forth, are wholly now defaced;
And those sweete wits, which wont the like to frame,
Are now despizd, and made a laughing game.

And he, the man whom Nature selfe had made
To mock her selfe, and truth to imitate,
With kindly counter under Mimick shade,
Our pleasant Willy, ah! *is dead of late;*
With whom all joy and jolly merriment
Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.

* * * * *

But that same gentle Spirit, from whose pen
Large streames of honnie and sweete Nectar flowe,
Scorning the boldnes of such base-borne men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashlie throwe,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,
Than so himselfe to mockerie to sell.

But the most remarkable of these pieces is a satirical fable, *Mother Hubberd's Tale of the Ape and Fox*, which may take rank with the satirical writings of Chaucer and Dryden for keenness of touch, for breadth of treatment, for swing and fiery scorn, and sustained strength of sarcasm. By his visit to the Court, Spenser had increased his knowledge of the realities of life. That brilliant Court, with a goddess at its head, and full of charming swains and divine nymphs, had also another side. It was still his poetical heaven. But with that odd insensibility to anomaly and glaring contrasts, which is seen in his time, and perhaps exists at all times, he passed from the celebration of the dazzling glories of Cynthia's Court, into a fierce vein of invective against its treacheries, its vain shows, its unceasing and mean intrigues, its savage jealousies, its fatal rivalries, the scramble there for preferment in Church and State. When it is considered what great persons might easily and naturally have been identified at the time with the *Ape and the Fox*, the confederate impostors, charlatans, and bullying swindlers, who had stolen the lion's skin, and by it mounted to the high places of the State, it seems to be a proof of the indifference of the Court to the power of mere literature, that it should have been safe to write and publish so freely, and so cleverly. Dull Catholic lampoons and Puritan scurrilities did not pass thus unnoticed. They were viewed as dangerous to the State, and dealt with accordingly. The fable contains what we can scarcely doubt to be some of that wisdom which Spenser learnt by his experience of the Court.

> So pitifull a thing is Suters state!
> Most miserable man, whom wicked fate
> Hath brought to Court, to sue for *had-ywist*,
> That few have found, and manie one hath mist!

Full little knowest thou, that hast not tride,
What hell it is in suing long to bide:
To loose good dayes, that might be better spent;
To wast long nights in pensive discontent;
To speed to day, to be put back to morrow;
To feed on hope, to pine with feare and sorrow;
To have thy Princes grace, yet want her Peeres;
To have thy asking, yet waite manie yeeres;
To fret thy soule with crosses and with cares;
To eate thy heart through comfortlesse dispaires;
To fawne, to crowche, to waite, to ride, to ronne,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undonne.
Unhappie wight, borne to disastrous end,
That doth his life in so long tendance spend!
Who ever leaves sweete home, where meane estate
In safe assurance, without strife or hate,
Findes all things needfull for contentment meeke,
And will to Court for shadowes vaine to seeke,
Or hope to gaine, himselfe will a daw trie:
That curse God send unto mine enemie!

Spenser probably did not mean his characters to fit too closely to living persons. That might have been dangerous. But it is difficult to believe that he had not distinctly in his eye a very great personage, the greatest in England next to the Queen, in the following picture of the doings of the Fox installed at Court.

But the false Foxe most kindly plaid his part;
For whatsoever mother-wit or arte
Could worke, he put in proofe: no practise slie,
No counterpoint of cunning policie,
No reach, no breach, that might him profit bring,
But hé the same did to his purpose wring.
Nought suffered he the Ape to give or graunt,
But through his hand must passe the Fiaunt.
* * * * *
He chaffred Chayres in which Churchmen were set,
And breach of lawes to privie ferme did let:
No statute so established might bee,
Nor ordinaunce so needfull, but that hee

Would violate, though not with violence,
Yet under colour of the confidence
The which the Ape repos'd in him alone,
And reckned him the kingdomes corner stone.
And ever, when he ought would bring to pas,
His long experience the platforme was:
And, when he ought not pleasing would put by
The cloke was care of thrift, and husbandry,
For to encrease the common treasures store;
But his owne treasure he encreased more,
And lifted up his loftie towres thereby,
That they began to threat the neighbour sky;
The whiles the Princes pallaces fell fast
To ruine (for what thing can ever last?)
And whilest the other Peeres, for povertie,
Were forst their auncient houses to let lie,
And their olde Castles to the ground to fall,
Which their forefathers, famous over-all,
Had founded for the Kingdome's ornament,
And for their memories long moniment:
But he no count made of Nobilitie,
Nor the wilde beasts whom armes did glorifie,
The Realmes chiefe strength and girlond of the crowne.
All these through fained crimes he thrust adowne,
Or made them dwell in darknes of disgrace;
For none, but whom he list, might come in place.
Of men of armes he had but small regard,
But kept them lowe, and streigned verie hard.
For men of learning little he esteemed;
His wisdome he above their learning deemed.
As for the rascall Commons, least he cared,
For not so common was his bountie shared.
Let God, (said he) if please, care for the manie,
I for my selfe must care before els anie.
So did he good to none, to manie ill,
So did he all the kingdome rob and pill;
Yet none durst speake, ne none durst of him plaine,
So great he was in grace, and rich through gaine.
Ne would he anie let to have accesse
Unto the Prince, but by his owne addresse,
For all that els did come were sure to faile.

Even at Court, however, the poet finds a contrast to all this: he had known Philip Sidney, and Ralegh was his friend.

Yet the brave Courtier, in whose beauteous thought
Regard of honour harbours more than ought,
Doth loath such base condition, to backbite
Anies good name for envie or despite:
He stands on tearmes of honourable minde,
Ne will be carried with the common winde
Of Courts inconstant mutabilitie,
Ne after everie tattling fable flie;
But heares and sees the follies of the rest,
And thereof gathers for himselfe the best.
He will not creepe, nor crouche with fained face,
But walkes upright with comely stedfast pace,
And unto all doth yeeld due curtesie;
But not with kissed hand belowe the knee,
As that same Apish crue is wont to doo:
For he disdaines himselfe t' embase theretoo.
He hates fowle leasings, and vile flatterie,
Two filthie blots in noble gentrie;
And lothefull idlenes he doth detest,
The canker worme of everie gentle brest.

Or lastly, when the bodie list to pause,
His minde unto the Muses he withdrawes:
Sweete Ladie Muses, Ladies of delight,
Delights of life, and ornaments of light!
With whom he close confers with wise discourse,
Of Natures workes, of heavens continuall course,
Of forreine lands, of people different,
Of kingdomes change, of divers gouvernment,
Of dreadfull battailes of renowned Knights;
With which he kindleth his ambitious sprights
To like desire and praise of noble fame,
The onely upshot whereto he doth ayme:
For all his minde on honour fixed is,
To which he levels all his purposis,
And in his Princes service spends his dayes
Not so much for to gaine, or for to raise

Himselfe to high degree, as for his grace,
And in his liking to winne worthie place,
Through due deserts and comely carriage.

The fable also throws light on the way in which Spenser regarded the religious parties, whose strife was becoming loud and threatening. Spenser is often spoken of as a Puritan. He certainly had the Puritan hatred of Rome; and in the Church system as it existed in England he saw many instances of ignorance, laziness, and corruption; and he agreed with the Puritans in denouncing them. His pictures of the "formal priest," with his excuses for doing nothing, his new-fashioned and improved substitutes for the ornate and also too lengthy ancient service, and his general ideas of self-complacent comfort, has in it an odd mixture of Roman Catholic irony with Puritan censure. Indeed, though Spenser hated with an Englishman's hatred all that he considered Roman superstition and tyranny, he had a sense of the poetical impressiveness of the old ceremonial, and the ideas which clung to it, its pomp, its beauty, its suggestiveness, very far removed from the iconoclastic temper of the Puritans. In his *View of the State of Ireland*, he notes as a sign of its evil condition the state of the churches, "most of them ruined and even with the ground," and the rest "so unhandsomely patched and thatched, that men do even shun the places, for the uncomeliness thereof." "The outward form (assure yourself)," he adds, "doth greatly draw the rude people to the reverencing and frequenting thereof, *whatever some of our late too nice fools may say*, that there is nothing in the seemly form and comely order of the church."

"Ah! but (said th' Ape) the charge is wondrous great,
To feede mens soules, and hath an heavie threat."
"To feed mens soules (quoth he) is not in man;
For they must feed themselves, doo what we can.

We are but charged to lay the meate before:
Eate they that list, we need to doo no more.
But God it is that feeds them with his grace,
The bread of life powr'd downe from heavenly place.
Therefore said he, that with the budding rod
Did rule the Jewes, *All shalbe taught of God.*
That same hath Jesus Christ now to him raught,
By whom the flock is rightly fed, and taught:
He is the Shepheard, and the Priest is hee;
We but his shepheard swaines ordain'd to bee.
Therefore herewith doo not your selfe dismay;
Ne is the paines so great, but beare ye may,
For not so great, as it was wont of yore,
It's now a dayes, ne halfe so streight and sore.
They whilome used duly everie day
Their service and their holie things to say,
At morne and even, besides their Anthemes sweete,
Their penie Masses, and their Complynes meete,
Their Diriges, their Trentals, and their shrifts,
Their memories, their singings, and their gifts.
Now all those needlesse works are laid away;
Now once a weeke, upon the Sabbath day,
It is enough to doo our small devotion,
And then to follow any merrie motion.
Ne are we tyde to fast, but when we list;
Ne to weare garments base of wollen twist,
But with the finest silkes us to aray,
That before God we may appeare more gay,
Resembling Aarons glorie in his place:
For farre unfit it is, that person bace
Should with vile cloaths approach Gods majestie,
Whom no uncleannes may approachen nie;
Or that all men, which anie master serve,
Good garments for their service should deserve;
But he that serves the Lord of hoasts most high,
And that in highest place, t' approach him nigh,
And all the peoples prayers to present
Before his throne, as on ambassage sent
Both too and fro, should not deserve to weare
A garment better than of wooll or heare
Beside, we may have lying by our sides
Our lovely Lasses, or bright shining Brides:

We be not tyde to wilfull chastitie,
But have the Gospell of free libertie."

But his weapon is double-edged, and he had not much more love for

That ungracious crew which feigns demurest grace.

The first prescription which the Priest gives to the Fox who desires to rise to preferment in the Church is to win the favour of some great Puritan noble.

First, therefore, when ye have in handsome wise
Your selfe attyred, as you can devise,
Then to some Noble-man your selfe applye,
Or other great one in the worldës eye,
That hath a zealous disposition
To God, and so to his religion.
There must thou fashion eke a godly zeale,
Such as no carpers may contrayre reveale;
For each thing fained ought more warie bee.
There thou must walke in sober gravitee,
And seeme as Saintlike as Sainte Radegund:
Fast much, pray oft, looke lowly on the ground,
And unto everie one doo curtesie meeke:
These lookes (nought saying) doo a benefice seeke,
And be thou sure one not to lack or long.

But he is impartial, and points out that there are other ways of rising—by adopting the fashions of the Court, "facing, and forging, and scoffing, and crouching to please," and so to "mock out a benefice;" or else, by compounding with a patron to give him half the profits, and in the case of a bishopric, to submit to the alienation of its manors to some powerful favourite, as the Bishop of Salisbury had to surrender Sherborn to Sir Walter Ralegh. Spenser, in his dedication of *Mother Hubberd's Tale* to one of the daughters of Sir John Spencer, Lady Compton and Monteagle, speaks of it as "long

sithence composed in the raw conceit of youth." But, whatever this may mean, and it was his way thus to deprecate severe judgments, his allowing the publication of it at this time, shows, if the work itself did not show it, that he was in very serious earnest in his bitter sarcasms on the base and evil arts which brought success at the Court.

He stayed in England about a year and a half [1590-91], long enough apparently to make up his mind that he had not much to hope for from his great friends, Ralegh and perhaps Essex, who were busy on their own schemes. Ralegh, from whom Spenser might hope most, was just beginning to plunge into that extraordinary career, in the thread of which glory and disgrace, far-sighted and princely public spirit and insatiate private greed, were to be so strangely intertwined. In 1592 he planned the great adventure which astonished London by the fabulous plunder of the Spanish treasure-ships; in the same year he was in the Tower, under the Queen's displeasure for his secret marriage, affecting the most ridiculous despair at her going away from the neighbourhood, and pouring forth his flatteries on this old woman of sixty as if he had no bride of his own to love:—"I that was wont to behold her riding like Alexander, hunting like Diana, walking like Venus; the gentle wind blowing her fair hair about her pure cheeks like a nymph; sometimes, sitting in the shade like a goddess; sometimes, singing like an angel; sometimes, playing like Orpheus—behold the sorrow of this world—once amiss, hath bereaved me of all." Then came the exploration of Guiana, the expedition to Cadiz, the Island voyage [1595—1597]. Ralegh had something else to do than to think of Spenser's fortunes.

Spenser turned back once more to Ireland, to his clerkship of the Council of Munster, which he soon resigned; to be worried with law-suits about "lands in Shanballymore and Ballingrath," by his time-serving and oppressive Irish neighbour, Maurice Roche, Lord Fermoy; to brood still over his lost ideal and hero, Sidney; to write the story of his visit in the pastoral supplement to the *Shepherd's Calendar*, *Colin Clout's come home again*; to pursue the story of Gloriana's knights; and to find among the Irish maidens another Elizabeth, a wife instead of a queen, whose wooing and winning were to give new themes to his imagination.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAERY QUEEN.

"*Uncouth* [=unknown], *unkist*," are the words from Chaucer,[1] with which the friend, who introduced Spenser's earliest poetry to the world, bespeaks forbearance, and promises matter for admiration and delight in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. "You have to know my new poet, he says in effect: and when you have learned his ways, you will find how much you have to honour and love him." "I doubt not," he says, with a boldness of prediction, manifestly sincere, which is remarkable about an unknown man, "that so soon as his name shall come into the knowledge of men, and his worthiness be sounded in the trump of fame, but that he shall be not only kissed, but also beloved of all, embraced of the most, and wondered at of the best." Never was prophecy more rapidly and more signally verified, probably beyond the prophet's largest expectation. But he goes on to explain and indeed apologize for certain features of the new poet's work, which even to readers of that day might seem open to exception. And to readers of to-day, the phrase, *uncouth, unkist*, certainly expresses what many have to confess, if they are honest, as to their first acquaintance with the

[1] "Unknow, unkyst; and lost, that is unsoght."
Troylus and Cryseide, lib. i.

Faery Queen. Its place in literature is established beyond controversy. Yet its first and unfamiliar aspect inspires respect, perhaps interest, rather than attracts and satisfies. It is not the remoteness of the subject alone, nor the distance of three centuries which raises a bar between it and those to whom it is new. Shakespere becomes familiar to us from the first moment. The impossible legends of Arthur have been made in the language of to-day once more to touch our sympathies, and have lent themselves to express our thoughts. But at first acquaintance the *Faery Queen* to many of us has been disappointing. It has seemed not only antique, but artificial. It has seemed fantastic. It has seemed, we cannot help avowing, tiresome. It is not till the early appearances have worn off, and we have learned to make many allowances and to surrender ourselves to the feelings and the standards by which it claims to affect and govern us, that we really find under what noble guidance we are proceeding, and what subtle and varied spells are ever round us.

I. The *Faery Queen* is the work of an unformed literature, the product of an unperfected art. English poetry, English language, in Spenser's, nay in Shakespere's day, had much to learn, much to unlearn. They never, perhaps, have been stronger or richer, than in that marvellous burst of youth, with all its freedom of invention, of observation, of reflection. But they had not that which only the experience and practice of eventful centuries could give them. Even genius must wait for the gifts of time. It cannot forerun the limitations of its day, nor anticipate the conquests and common possessions of the future. Things are impossible to the first great masters of art which are easy to their second-rate successors. The possibility, or the necessity of breaking

through some convention, of attempting some unattempted effort, had not, among other great enterprises, occurred to them. They were laying the steps in a magnificent fashion on which those after them were to rise. But we ought not to shut our eyes to mistakes or faults to which attention had not yet been awakened, or for avoiding which no reasonable means had been found. To learn from genius, we must try to recognize, both what is still imperfect, and what is grandly and unwontedly successful. There is no great work of art, not excepting even the Iliad or the Parthenon, which is not open, especially in point of ornament, to the scoff of the scoffer, or to the injustice of those who do not mind being unjust. But all art belongs to man; and man, even when he is greatest, is always limited and imperfect.

The *Faery Queen*, as a whole, bears on its face a great fault of construction. It carries with it no adequate account of its own story; it does not explain itself, or contain in its own structure what would enable a reader to understand how it arose. It has to be accounted for by a prose explanation and key outside of itself. The poet intended to reserve the central event, which was the occasion of all the adventures of the poem, till they had all been related, leaving them as it were in the air, till at the end of twelve long books the reader should at last be told how the whole thing had originated, and what it was all about. He made the mistake of confounding the answer to a riddle with the crisis which unties the tangle of a plot and satisfies the suspended interest of a tale. None of the great model poems before him, however full of digression and episode, had failed to arrange their story with clearness. They needed no commentary outside themselves to say why they began as they did, and out of

what antecedents they arose. If they started at once from the middle of things, they made their story, as it unfolded itself, explain, by more or less skilful devices, all that needed to be known about their beginnings. They did not think of rules of art. They did of themselves naturally what a good story-teller does, to make himself intelligible and interesting; and it is not easy to be interesting, unless the parts of the story are in their place.

The defect seems to have come upon Spenser when it was too late to remedy it in the construction of his poem; and he adopted the somewhat clumsy expedient of telling us what the poem itself ought to have told us of its general story, in a letter to Sir Walter Ralegh. Ralegh himself, indeed, suggested the letter: apparently (from the date, Jan. 23, 1590), after the first part had gone through the press. And without this after-thought, as the twelfth book was never reached, we should have been left to gather the outline and plan of the story, from imperfect glimpses and allusions, as we have to fill up from hints and assumptions the gaps of an unskilful narrator, who leaves out what is essential to the understanding of his tale.

Incidentally, however, this letter is an advantage: for we have in it the poet's own statement of his purpose in writing, as well as a necessary sketch of his story. His allegory, as he had explained to Bryskett and his friends, had a moral purpose. He meant to shadow forth, under the figures of twelve knights, and in their various exploits, the characteristics of "a gentleman or noble person," "fashioned in virtuous and gentle discipline." He took his machinery from the popular legends about King Arthur, and his heads of moral philosophy from the current Aristotelian catalogue of the Schools.

Sir, knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit, I haue thought good, as well for avoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions, as also for your better light in reading thereof, (being so by you commanded,) to discover unto you the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I have fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes, or by accidents, therein occasioned. The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter then for profite of the ensample, I chose the historye of King Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspition of present time. In which I have followed all the antique Poets historicall; first Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis: then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando: and lately Tasso dissevered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo; the other named Politice in his Godfredo. By ensample of which excellente Poets, I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised; the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of polliticke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king.

Then, after explaining that he meant the *Faery Queen* "for glory in general intention, but in particular" for Elizabeth, and his Faery Land for her kingdom, he pro-

ceeds to explain, what the first three books hardly explain, what the Faery Queen had to do with the structure of the poem.

But, because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupte, and as depending upon other antecedents, it needs that ye know the occasion of these three knights seuerall adventures. For the Methode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions; but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all.

The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by an Historiographer should be the twelfth booke, which is the last; where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii. dayes; uppon which xii. severall dayes, the occasions of the xii. severall adventures hapned, which, being undertaken by xii. severall knights, are in these xii. books severally handled and discoursed. The first was this. In the beginning of the feast, there presented him selfe a tall clownishe younge man, who falling before the Queene of Faries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might not refuse; which was that hee might have the atchievement of any adventure, which during that feaste should happen: that being graunted, he rested him on the floore, unfitte through his rusticity for a better place. Soone after entred a faire Ladye in mourning weedes, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarfe behinde her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his speare in the dwarfes hand. Shee, falling before the Queene of Faeries, complayned that her father and mother, an ancient King and Queene, had beene by an huge dragon many years shut up in a brasen Castle, who thence suffred them not to yssew; and therefore besought the Faery Queene to assygne her some one of her knights to take on him that exployt. Presently that clownish person, upstarting, desired that adventure: whereat the Queene much wondering,

and the Lady much gainesaying, yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him, that unlesse that armour which she brought would serve him (that is, the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul, vi. Ephes.) that he could not succeed in that enterprise; which being forthwith put upon him, with dewe furnitures thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady. And eftesoones taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that straunge courser, he went forth with her on that adventure: where beginneth the first booke, viz.

A gentle knight was pricking on the playne, &c.

That it was not without reason that this explanatory key was prefixed to the work, and that either Spenser or Ralegh felt it to be almost indispensable, appear from the concluding paragraph.

Thus much, Sir, I have briefly overronne to direct your understanding to the wel-head of the History; that from thence gathering the whole intention of the conceit, ye may as in a handfull gripe al the discourse, which otherwise may happily seeme tedious and confused.

According to the plan thus sketched out, we have but a fragment of the work. It was published in two parcels, each of three books, in 1590 and 1596; and after his death two cantos, with two stray stanzas, of a seventh book were found and printed. Each perfect book consists of twelve cantos of from thirty-five to sixty of his nine-line stanzas. The books published in 1590 contain, as he states in his prefatory letter, the legends of *Holiness*, of *Temperance*, and of *Chastity*. Those published in 1596, contain the legends of *Friendship*, of *Justice*, and of *Courtesy*. The posthumous cantos are entitled, *Of Mutability*, and are said to be apparently parcel of a legend of *Constancy*. The poem which was to treat of the "politic" virtues was never

approached. Thus we have but a fourth part of the whole of the projected work. It is very doubtful whether the remaining six books were completed. But it is probable that a portion of them was written, which, except the cantos *On Mutability*, has perished. And the intended titles or legends of the later books have not been preserved.

Thus the poem was to be an allegorical story; a story branching out into twelve separate stories, which themselves would branch out again and involve endless other stories. It is a complex scheme to keep well in hand, and Spenser's art in doing so has been praised by some of his critics. But the art, if there is any, is so subtle that it fails to save the reader from perplexity. The truth is that the power of ordering and connecting a long and complicated plan was not one of Spenser's gifts. In the first two books, the allegorical story proceeds from point to point with fair coherence and consecutiveness. After them the attempt to hold the scheme together, except in the loosest and most general way, is given up as too troublesome or too confined. The poet prefixes indeed the name of a particular virtue to each book, but, with slender reference to it, he surrenders himself freely to his abundant flow of ideas, and to whatever fancy or invention tempts him, and ranges unrestrained over the whole field of knowledge and imagination. In the first two books, the allegory is transparent and the story connected. The allegory is of the nature of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It starts from the belief that religion, purified from falsehood, superstition, and sin, is the foundation of all nobleness in man; and it portrays, under images and with names, for the most part easily understood, and easily applied to real counterparts, the struggle which every one at that time supposed to be going on, between absolute truth

and righteousness on one side, and fatal error and bottomless wickedness on the other. Una, the Truth, the one and only Bride of man's spirit, marked out by the tokens of humility and innocence, and by her power over wild and untamed natures—the single Truth, in contrast to the counterfeit Duessa, false religion, and its actual embodiment in the false rival Queen of Scots—Truth, the object of passionate homage, real with many, professed with all, which after the impostures and scandals of the preceding age, had now become characteristic of that of Elizabeth—Truth, its claims, its dangers, and its champions, are the subject of the first book: and it is represented as leading the manhood of England, in spite, not only of terrible conflict, but of defeat and falls, through the discipline of repentance, to holiness and the blessedness which comes with it. The Red Cross Knight, St. George of England, whose name Georgos, the Ploughman, is dwelt upon, apparently to suggest that from the commonalty, the "tall clownish young men," were raised up the great champions of the Truth,—though sorely troubled by the wiles of Duessa, by the craft of the arch-sorcerer, by the force and pride of the great powers of the Apocalyptic Beast and Dragon, finally overcomes them, and wins the deliverance of Una and her love.

The second book, *Of Temperance*, pursues the subject, and represents the internal conquests of self-mastery, the conquests of a man over his passions, his violence, his covetousness, his ambition, his despair, his sensuality. Sir Guyon, after conquering many foes of goodness, is the destroyer of the most perilous of them all, Acrasia, licentiousness, and her ensnaring Bower of Bliss. But after this, the thread at once of story and allegory, slender henceforth at the best, is neglected and often entirely

lost. The third book, the *Legend of Chastity*, is a repetition of the ideas of the latter part of the second, with a heroine, Britomart, in place of the Knight of the previous book, Sir Guyon, and with a special glorification of the high-flown and romantic sentiments about purity, which were the poetic creed of the courtiers of Elizabeth, in flagrant and sometimes in tragic contrast to their practical conduct of life. The loose and ill-compacted nature of the plan becomes still more evident in the second instalment of the work. Even the special note of each particular virtue becomes more faint and indistinct. The one law to which the poet feels bound is to have twelve cantos in each book; and to do this he is sometimes driven to what in later times has been called padding. One of the cantos of the third book is a genealogy of British kings from Geoffrey of Monmouth; one of the cantos of the *Legend of Friendship* is made up of an episode, describing the marriage of the Thames and the Medway, with an elaborate catalogue of the English and Irish rivers, and the names of the sea-nymphs. In truth, he had exhausted his proper allegory, or he got tired of it. His poem became an elastic framework, into which he could fit whatever interested him and tempted him to composition. The gravity of the first books disappears. He passes into satire and caricature. We meet with Braggadochio and Trompart, with the discomfiture of Malecasta, with the conjugal troubles of Malbecco and Helenore, with the imitation from Ariosto of the Squire of Dames. He puts into verse a poetical physiology of the human body; he translates Lucretius, and speculates on the origin of human souls; he speculates, too, on social justice, and composes an argumentative refutation of the Anabaptist theories of right and equality

among men. As the poem proceeds, he seems to feel himself more free to introduce what he pleases. Allusions to real men and events are sometimes clear, at other times evident, though they have now ceased to be intelligible to us. His disgust and resentment breaks out at the ways of the Court in sarcastic moralizing, or in pictures of dark and repulsive imagery. The characters and pictures of his friends furnish material for his poem; he does not mind touching on the misadventures of Ralegh, and even of Lord Grey, with sly humour or a word of candid advice. He becomes bolder in the distinct introduction of contemporary history. The defeat of Duessa was only figuratively shown in the first portion; in the second the subject is resumed. As Elizabeth is the "one form of many names," Gloriana, Belphœbe, Britomart, Mercilla, so "under feigned colours shading a true case" he deals with her rival. Mary seems at one time the false Florimel, the creature of enchantment, stirring up strife, and fought for by the foolish knights whom she deceives, Blandamour and Paridell, the counterparts of Norfolk and the intriguers of 1571. At another, she is the fierce Amazonian queen, Radegund, by whom for a moment, even Arthegal is brought into disgraceful thraldom, till Britomart, whom he has once fought against, delivers him. And finally the fate of the typical Duessa is that of the real Mary Queen of Scots described in great detail—a liberty in dealing with great affairs of state for which James of Scotland actually desired that he should be tried and punished.[2] So Philip II. is at one time the Soldan, at another the Spanish monster Geryoneo, at another the fosterer of Catholic intrigues in France and Ireland, Grantorto. But real names are also introduced

[2] Hales' *Life*, Globe Edition.

with scarcely any disguise: Guizor, and Burbon, the Knight who throws away his shield, Henry IV., and his Lady Flourdelis, the Lady Belge, and her seventeen sons: the Lady Irena, whom Arthegal delivers. The overthrow of the Armada, the English war in the Low Countries, the apostasy of Henry IV., the deliverance of Ireland from the "great wrong" of Desmond's rebellion, the giant Grantorto, form, under more or less transparent allegory, great part of the *Legend of Justice*. Nay, Spenser's long fostered revenge on the lady who had once scorned him, the *Rosalind* of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, the *Mirabella* of the *Faery Queen*, and his own late and happy marriage in Ireland, are also brought in to supply materials for the *Legend of Courtesy*. So multifarious is the poem, full of all that he thought, or observed, or felt; a receptacle, without much care to avoid repetition, or to prune, correct, and condense, for all the abundance of his ideas, as they welled forth in his mind day by day. It is really a collection of separate tales and allegories, as much as the *Arabian Nights*, or, as its counterpart and rival of our own century, the *Idylls of the King*. As a whole it is confusing: but we need not treat it as a whole. Its continued interest soon breaks down. But it is probably best that Spenser gave his mind the vague freedom which suited it, and that he did not make efforts to tie himself down to his pre-arranged but too ambitious plan. We can hardly lose our way in it, for there is no way to lose. It is a wilderness in which we are left to wander. But there may be interest and pleasure in a wilderness, if we are prepared for the wandering.

Still, the complexity, or rather, the uncared-for and clumsy arrangement of the poem is matter which dis-

turbs a reader's satisfaction, till he gets accustomed to the poet's way, and resigns himself to it. It is a heroic poem, in which the heroine, who gives her name to it, never appears: a story, of which the basis and starting-point is whimsically withheld for disclosure in the last book, which was never written. If Ariosto's jumps and transitions are more audacious, Spenser's intricacy is more puzzling. Adventures begin which have no finish. Actors in them drop from the clouds, claim an interest, and we ask in vain what has become of them. A vein of what are manifestly contemporary allusions breaks across the moral drift of the allegory, with an apparently distinct yet obscured meaning, and one of which it is the work of dissertations to find the key. The passion of the age was for ingenious riddling in morality as in love. And in Spenser's allegories we are not seldom at a loss to make out what and how much was really intended, amid a maze of overstrained analogies and over-subtle conceits, and attempts to hinder a too close and dangerous identification.

Indeed Spenser's mode of allegory, which was historical as well as moral, and contains a good deal of history, if we knew it, often seems devised to throw curious readers off the scent. It was purposely baffling and hazy. A characteristic trait was singled out. A name was transposed in anagram, like Irena, or distorted, as if by imperfect pronunciation, like Burbon and Arthegal, or invented to express a quality, like Una, or Gloriana, or Corceca, or Fradubio, or adopted with no particular reason from the *Morte d'Arthur*, or any other old literature. The personage is introduced with some feature, or amid circumstances which seem for a moment to fix the meaning. But when we look to the sequence of history being kept

up in the sequence of the story, we find ourselves thrown out. A character which fits one person puts on the marks of another: a likeness which we identify with one real person passes into the likeness of some one else. The real, in person, incident, institution, shades off into the ideal; after showing itself by plain tokens, it turns aside out of its actual path of fact, and ends, as the poet thinks it ought to end, in victory or defeat, glory or failure. Prince Arthur passes from Leicester to Sidney, and then back again to Leicester. There are double or treble allegories; Elizabeth is Gloriana, Belphœbe, Britomârt, Mercilla, perhaps Amoret; her rival is Duessa, the false Florimel, probably the fierce temptress, the Amazon Radegund. Thus, what for a moment was clear and definite, fades like the changing fringe of a dispersing cloud. The character which we identified disappears in other scenes and adventures, where we lose sight of all that identified it. A complete transformation destroys the likeness which was begun. There is an intentional dislocation of the parts of the story, when they might make it imprudently close in its reflection of facts or resemblance in portraiture. A feature is shown, a manifest allusion made, and then the poet starts off in other directions, to confuse and perplex all attempts at interpretation, which might be too particular and too certain. This was no doubt merely according to the fashion of the time, and the habits of mind into which the poet had grown. But there were often reasons for it, in an age so suspicious, and so dangerous to those who meddled with high matters of state.

2. Another feature which is on the surface of the *Faery Queen*, and which will displease a reader who has been trained to value what is natural and genuine, is its affec-

tation of the language and the customs of life belonging to an age which is not its own. It is indeed redolent of the present: but it is almost avowedly an imitation of what was current in the days of Chaucer: of what were supposed to be the words, and the social ideas and conditions, of the age of chivalry. He looked back to the fashions and ideas of the Middle Ages, as Pindar sought his materials in the legends and customs of the Homeric times, and created a revival of the spirit of the age of the Heroes in an age of tyrants and incipient democracies.[3] The age of chivalry, in Spenser's day far distant, had yet left two survivals, one real, the other formal. The real survival was the spirit of armed adventure, which was never stronger or more stirring than in the gallants and discoverers of Elizabeth's reign, the captains of the English companies in the Low Countries, the audacious sailors who explored unknown oceans and plundered the Spaniards, the scholars and gentlemen equally ready for work on sea and land, like Ralegh and Sir Richard Grenville, of the "Revenge." The formal survival was the fashion of keeping up the trappings of knightly times, as we keep up Judge's wigs, court dresses, and Lord Mayor's shows. In actual life it was seen in pageants and ceremonies, in the yet lingering parade of jousts and tournaments, in the knightly accoutrements still worn in the days of the bullet and the cannon-ball. In the apparatus of the poet, as all were shepherds, when he wanted to represent the life of peace and letters, so all were knights or the foes and victims of knights, when his theme was action and enterprise. It was the custom that the Muse masked, to use Spenser's word, under these

[3] *Vid.* Keble, *Prælect. Acad.*, xxiv. p. 479, 480.

disguises; and this conventional masquerade of pastoral poetry or knight errantry was the form under which the poetical school that preceded the dramatists naturally expressed their ideas. It seems to us odd that peaceful sheepcotes and love-sick swains should stand for the world of the Tudors and Guises, or that its cunning statecraft and relentless cruelty should be represented by the generous follies of an imaginary chivalry. But it was the fashion which Spenser found, and he accepted it. His genius was not of that sort which breaks out from trammels, but of that which makes the best of what it finds. And whatever we may think of the fashion, at least he gave it new interest and splendour by the spirit with which he threw himself into it.

The condition which he took as the groundwork of his poetical fabric suggested the character of his language. Chaucer was then the "God of English poetry;" his was the one name which filled a place apart in the history of English verse. Spenser was a student of Chaucer, and borrowed as he judged fit, not [illegible] his vocabulary, but from his grammatical prece[illegible] analogies, with the object of giving an appropriat[illegible]uring to what was to be raised as far as possible above familiar life. Besides this, the language was still in such an unsettled state that from a man with resources like Spenser's, it naturally invited attempts to enrich and colour it, to increase its flexibility and power. The liberty of reviving old forms, of adopting from the language of the street and market homely but expressive words or combinations, of following in the track of convenient constructions, of venturing on new and bold phrases, was rightly greater in his time than at a later stage of the language. Many of his words, either invented or preserved, are happy additions; some

which have not taken root in the language, we may regret. But it was a liberty which he abused. He was extravagant and unrestrained in his experiments on language. And they were made not merely to preserve or to invent a good expression. On his own authority, he cuts down, or he alters a word, or he adopts a mere corrupt pronunciation, to suit a place in his metre, or because he wants a rime. Precedents, as Mr. Guest has said, may no doubt be found for each one of these sacrifices to the necessities of metre or rime, in some one or other living dialectic usage, or even in printed books—"*blend*" for "*blind*," "*misleeke*" for "*mislike*," "*kest*" for "*cast*," "*cherry*" for "*cherish*," "*vilde*" for "*vile*," or even "*wawes*" for "*waves*," because it has to rime to "*jaws*." But when they are profusely used as they are in Spenser, they argue, as critics of his own age such as Puttenham, remarked,—either want of trouble, or want of resource. In his impatience he is reckless in making a word which he wants—"fortunize," "mercified," "unblindfold," "relive"—he is reckless in making one word do the duty of another, interchanging actives and passives, transferring epithets from their proper subjects. The "humbled grass," is the grass on which a man lies humbled: the "lamentable eye," is the eye which laments. "His treatment of words," says Mr. Craik, "on such occasions"—occasions of difficulty to his verse—"is like nothing that ever was seen, unless it might be Hercules breaking the back of the Nemean lion. He gives them any sense and any shape that the case may demand. Sometimes he merely alters a letter or two; sometimes he twists off the head or the tail of the unfortunate vocable altogether. But this fearless, lordly, truly royal style makes one only feel the more how easily, if he chose,

he could avoid the necessity of having recourse to such outrages."

His own generation felt his licence to be extreme. "In affecting the ancients," said Ben Jonson, "he writ no language." Daniel writes sarcastically, soon after the *Faery Queen* appeared, of those who

> Sing of knights and Palladines,
> In aged accents and untimely words.

And to us, though students of the language must always find interest in the storehouse of ancient or invented language to be found in Spenser, this mixture of what is obsolete or capriciously new is a bar, and not an unreasonable one, to a frank welcome at first acquaintance. Fuller remarks with some slyness, that "the many Chaucerisms used (for I will not say, affected) by him, are thought by the ignorant to be blemishes, known by the learned to be beauties, in his book; which notwithstanding had been more saleable, if more conformed to our modern language." The grotesque, though it has its place as one of the instruments of poetical effect, is a dangerous element to handle. Spenser's age was very insensible to the presence and the dangers of the grotesque, and he was not before his time in feeling what was unpleasing in incongruous mixtures. Strong in the abundant but unsifted learning of his day, a style of learning, which in his case was strangely inaccurate, he not only mixed the past with the present, fairyland with politics, mythology with the most serious Christian ideas, but he often mixed together the very features which are most discordant, in the colours, forms, and methods by which he sought to produce the effect of his pictures.

3. Another source of annoyance and disappointment is

found in the imperfections and inconsistencies of the poet's standard of what is becoming to say and to write about. Exaggeration, diffuseness, prolixity, were the literary diseases of the age; an age of great excitement and hope, which had suddenly discovered its wealth and its powers, but not the rules of true economy in using them. With the classics open before it, and alive to much of the grandeur of their teaching, it was almost blind to the spirit of self-restraint, proportion, and simplicity which governed the great models. It was left to a later age to discern these and appreciate them. This unresisted proneness to exaggeration produced the extravagance and the horrors of the Elizabethan Drama, full, as it was, nevertheless, of insight and originality. It only too naturally led the earlier Spenser astray. What Dryden, in one of his interesting critical prefaces says of himself, is true of Spenser; "Thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject; to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose." There was in Spenser a facility for turning to account all material, original or borrowed, an incontinence of the descriptive faculty, which was ever ready to exercise itself on any object, the most unfitting and loathsome, as on the noblest, the purest, or the most beautiful. There are pictures in him which seem meant to turn our stomach. Worse than that there are pictures which for a time rank the poet of *Holiness* or *Temperance*, with the painters who used their great art to represent at once the most sacred and holiest forms, and also scenes which few people now like to look upon in company—scenes and descriptions which may perhaps from the habits of the time may have been playfully and innocently produced, but which it is certainly not easy to dwell upon innocently

now. And apart from these serious faults, there is continually haunting us, amid incontestable richness, vigour, and beauty, a sense that the work is over-done. Spenser certainly did not want for humour and an eye for the ridiculous. There is no want in him, either, of that power of epigrammatic terseness, which, in spite of its diffuseness, his age valued and cultivated. But when he gets on a story or a scene, he never knows where to stop. His duels go on stanza after stanza till there is no sound part left in either champion. His palaces, landscapes, pageants, feasts, are taken to pieces in all their parts, and all these parts are likened to some other things. "His abundance," says Mr. Craik, "is often oppressive; *it is like wading among unmown grass.*" And he drowns us in words. His abundant and incongruous adjectives may sometimes, perhaps, startle us unfairly, because their associations and suggestions have quite altered; but very often they are the idle outpouring of an unrestrained affluence of language. The impression remains that he wants a due perception of the absurd, the unnatural, the unnecessary; that he does not care if he makes us smile, or does not know how to help it, when he tries to make us admire or sympathize.

Under this head comes a feature which the "charity of history" may lead us to treat as simple exaggeration, but which often suggests something less pardonable, in the great characters, political or literary, of Elizabeth's reign. This was the gross, shameless, lying flattery paid to the Queen. There is really nothing like it in history. It is unique as a phenomenon that proud, able, free-spoken men, with all their high instincts of what was noble and true, with all their admiration of the Queen's high qualities, should have offered it, even as an unmeaning custom; and that a proud and free-spoken people should not, in the

very genuineness of their pride in her and their loyalty, have received it with shouts of derision and disgust. The flattery of Roman emperors and Roman Popes, if as extravagant, was not so personal. Even Louis XIV. was not celebrated in his dreary old age, as a model of ideal beauty and a paragon of romantic perfection. It was no worship of a secluded and distant object of loyalty: the men who thus flattered knew perfectly well, often by painful experience, what Elizabeth was: able, indeed, high-spirited, successful, but ungrateful to her servants, capricious, vain, ill-tempered, unjust, and in her old age, ugly. And yet the Gloriana of the *Faery Queen*, the Empress of all nobleness,—Belphœbe, the Princess of all sweetness and beauty,—Britomart, the armed votaress of all purity,—Mercilla, the lady of all compassion and grace,—were but the reflections of the language in which it was then agreed upon by some of the greatest of Englishmen to speak, and to be supposed to think, of the Queen.

II. But when all these faults have been admitted, faults of design and faults of execution—and when it is admitted, further, that there is a general want of reality, substance, distinctness, and strength in the personages of the poem —that, compared with the contemporary drama, Spenser's knights and ladies and villains are thin and ghostlike, and that, as Daniel says, he

> Paints shadows in imaginary lines—

it yet remains that our greatest poets since his day have loved him and delighted in him. He had Shakespere's praise. Cowley was made a poet by reading him. Dryden calls Milton "the poetical son of Spenser:" "Milton," he writes, "has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original." Dryden's own homage to him is frequent and

generous. Pope found as much pleasure in the *Faery Queen* in his later years as he had found in reading it when he was twelve years old : and what Milton, Dryden, and Pope admired, Wordsworth too found full of nobleness, purity, and sweetness. What is it that gives the *Faery Queen* its hold on those who appreciate the richness and music of English language, and who in temper and moral standard are quick to respond to English manliness and tenderness? The spell is to be found mainly in three things—(1) in the quaint stateliness of Spenser's imaginary world and its representatives ; (2) in the beauty and melody of his numbers, the abundance and grace of his poetic ornaments, in the recurring and haunting rhythm of numberless passages, in which thought and imagery and language and melody are interwoven in one perfect and satisfying harmony ; and (3) in the intrinsic nobleness of his general aim, his conception of human life, at once so exacting and so indulgent, his high ethical principles and ideals, his unfeigned honour for all that is pure and brave and unselfish and tender, his generous estimate of what is due from man to man of service, affection, and fidelity. His fictions embodied truths of character which with all their shadowy incompleteness were too real and too beautiful to lose their charm with time.

1. Spenser accepted from his age the quaint stateliness which is characteristic of his poem. His poetry is not simple and direct like that of the Greeks. It has not the exquisite finish and felicity of the best of the Latins. It has not the massive grandeur, the depth, the freedom, the shades and subtle complexities of feeling and motive, which the English dramatists found by going straight to nature. It has the stateliness of highly artificial conditions of society, of the Court, the pageant, the tourna-

ment, as opposed to the majesty of the great events in human life and history, its real vicissitudes, its catastrophes, its tragedies, its revolutions, its sins. Throughout the prolonged crisis of Elizabeth's reign, her gay and dashing courtiers, and even her serious masters of affairs, persisted in pretending to look on the world in which they lived, as if through the side-scenes of a masque, and relieved against the background of a stage-curtain. Human life, in those days, counted for little; fortune, honour, national existence hung in the balance; the game was one in which the heads of kings and queens and great statesmen were the stakes,—yet the players could not get out of their stiff and constrained costume, out of their artificial and fantastic figments of thought, out of their conceits and affectations of language. They carried it, with all their sagacity, with all their intensity of purpose, to the council-board, and the judgment-seat. They carried it to the scaffold. The conventional supposition was that at the Court, though every one knew better, all was perpetual sunshine, perpetual holiday, perpetual triumph, perpetual love-making. It was the happy reign of the good and wise and lovely. It was the discomfiture of the base, the faithless, the wicked, the traitors. This is what is reflected in Spenser's poem; at once, its stateliness, for there was no want of grandeur and magnificence in the public scene ever before Spenser's imagination; and its quaintness, because the whole outward apparatus of representation was borrowed from what was past, or from what did not exist, and implied surrounding circumstances in ludicrous contrast with fact, and men taught themselves to speak in character, and prided themselves on keeping it up by substituting for the ordinary language of life and emotion a cumbrous and involved indirectness of speech.

And yet that quaint stateliness is not without its attractions. We have indeed to fit ourselves for it. But when we have submitted to its demands on our imagination, it carries us along as much as the fictions of the stage. The splendours of the artificial are not the splendours of the natural; yet the artificial has its splendours, which impress and captivate and repay. The grandeur of Spenser's poem is a grandeur like that of a great spectacle, a great array of the forces of a nation, a great series of military effects, a great ceremonial assemblage of all that is highest and most eminent in a country, a coronation, a royal marriage, a triumph, a funeral. So, though Spenser's knights and ladies do what no men ever could do, and speak what no man ever spoke, the procession rolls forward with a pomp which never forgets itself, and with an inexhaustible succession of circumstance, fantasy, and incident. Nor is it always solemn and high-pitched. Its gravity is relieved from time to time with the ridiculous figure or character, the ludicrous incident, the jests and antics of the buffoon. It has been said that Spenser never smiles. He not only smiles, with amusement or sly irony; he wrote what he must have laughed at as he wrote, and meant us to laugh at. He did not describe with a grave face the terrors and misadventures of the boaster Braggadochio and his Squire, whether or not a caricature of the Duke of Alençon and his "gentleman," the "petit singe," Simier. He did not write with a grave face the Irish row about the false Florimel (IV. 5), –

> Then unto Satyran she was adjudged,
> Who was right glad to gaine so goodly meed:
> But Blandamour thereat full greatly grudged,
> And litle prays'd his labours evill speed.

That for to winne the saddle lost the steed.
Ne lesse thereat did Paridell complaine,
And thought t'appeale from that which was decreed
To single combat with Sir Satyrane:
Thereto him Atè stird, new discord to maintaine.

And eke, with these, full many other Knights
She through her wicked working did incense
Her to demaund and chalenge as their rights,
Deserved for their porils recompense.
Amongst the rest, with boastfull vaine pretense,
Stept Braggadochio forth, and as his thrall
Her claym'd, by him in battell wonne long sens:
Whereto her selfe he did to witnesse call:
Who, being askt, accordingly confessed all.

Thereat exceeding wroth was Satyran;
And wroth with Satyran was Blandamour;
And wroth with Blandamour was Erivan;
And at them both Sir Paridell did loure.
So all together stird up strifull stoure,
And readie were new battell to darraine.
Each one profest to be her paramoure,
And vow'd with speare and shield it to maintaine;
Ne Judges powre, ne reasons rule, mote them restraine.

Nor the behaviour of the "rascal many" at the sight of the dead Dragon (I. 12),—

And after all the raskall many ran,
Heaped together in rude rablement,
To see the face of that victorious man,
Whom all admired as from heaven sent,
And gazd upon with gaping wonderment;
But when they came where that dead Dragon lay,
Stretcht on the ground in monstrous large extent,
The sight with ydle feare did them dismay,
Ne durst approch him nigh to touch, or once assay.

Some feard, and fledd; some feard, and well it fayned
One, that would wiser seeme then all the rest,
Warnd him not touch, for yet perhaps remaynd
Some lingring life within his hollow brest,

Or in his wombe might lurke some hidden nest
Of many Dragonettes, his fruitfull seede:
Another saide, that in his eyes did rest
Yet sparckling fyre, and badd thereof take heed;
Another said, he saw him move his eyes indeed.

One mother, whenas her foolehardy chyld
Did come too neare, and with his talants play,
Halfe dead through feare, her litle babe revyld,
And to her gossibs gan in counsell say;
'How can I tell, but that his talants may
Yet scratch my sonne, or rend his tender hand?'
So diversly them selves in vaine they fray;
Whiles some more bold to measure him nigh stand,
To prove how many acres he did spred of land.

And his humour is not the less real that it affects serious argument, in the excuse which he urges for his fairy tales (II. 1).

Right well I wote, most mighty Soveraine,
That all this famous antique history
Of some th' aboundance of an ydle braine
Will judged be, and painted forgery,
Rather then matter of just memory;
Sith none that breatheth living aire does know
Where is that happy land of Faery,
Which I so much doe vaunt, yet no where show,
But vouch antiquities, which no body can know.

But let that man with better sence advize,
That of the world least part to us is red;
And daily how through hardy enterprize
Many great Regions are discovered,
Which to late age were never mentioned
Who ever heard of th' Indian Peru?
Or who in venturous vessell measured
The Amazon huge river, now found trew
Or fruitfullest Virginia who did ever vew?

Yet all these were, when no man did them know,
Yet have from wisest ages hidden beene;
And later times thinges more unknowne shall show
Why then should witlesse man so much misweene,

That nothing is but that which he hath seene?
What if within the Moones fayre shining spheare,
What if in every other starre unseene
Of other worldes he happily should heare,
He wonder would much more; yet such to some appeare.

The general effect is almost always lively and rich: all is buoyant and full of movement. That it is also odd, that we see strange costumes and hear a language often formal and obsolete, that we are asked to take for granted some very unaccustomed supposition and extravagant assumption, does not trouble us more than the usages and sights, so strange to ordinary civil life, of a camp, or a royal levée. All is in keeping, whatever may be the details of the pageant; they harmonize with the effect of the whole, like the gargoyles and quaint groups in a Gothic building harmonize with its general tone of majesty and subtle beauty;—nay, as ornaments, in themselves of bad taste, like much of the ornamentation of the Renaissance styles, yet find a not unpleasing place in compositions grandly and nobly designed:

So discord oft in music makes the sweeter lay.

Indeed, it is curious how much of real variety is got out of a limited number of elements and situations. The spectacle, though consisting only of knights, ladies, dwarfs, pagans, "salvage men," enchanters, and monsters, and other well-worn machinery of the books of chivalry, is ever new, full of vigour and fresh images, even if, as sometimes happens, it repeats itself. There is a majestic unconsciousness of all violations of probability, and of the strangeness of the combinations which it unrolls before us.

2. But there is not only stateliness: there is sweetness

and beauty. Spenser's perception of beauty of all kinds was singularly and characteristically quick and sympathetic. It was one of his great gifts; perhaps the most special and unstinted. Except Shakespere, who had it with other and greater gifts, no one in that time approached to Spenser, in feeling the presence of that commanding and mysterious idea, compounded of so many things, yet of which the true secret escapes us still, to which we give the name of beauty. A beautiful scene, a beautiful person, a beautiful poem, a mind and character with that combination of charms, which, for want of another word, we call by that half-spiritual, half-material word "beautiful," at once set his imagination at work to respond to it and reflect it. His means of reflecting it were as abundant as his sense of it was keen. They were only too abundant. They often betrayed him by their affluence and wonderful readiness to meet his call. Say what we will, and a great deal may be said, of his lavish profusion, his heady and uncontrolled excess, in the richness of picture and imagery in which he indulges,—still there it lies before us, like the most gorgeous of summer gardens, in the glory and brilliancy of its varied blooms, in the wonder of its strange forms of life, in the changefulness of its exquisite and delicious scents. No one who cares for poetic beauty can be insensible to it. He may criticize it. He may have too much of it. He may prefer something more severe and chastened. He may observe on the waste of wealth and power. He may blame the prodigal expense of language, and the long spaces which the poet takes up to produce his effect. He may often dislike or distrust the moral aspect of the poet's impartial sensitiveness to all outward beauty,—the impartiality which makes him throw all his strength into

his pictures of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, the Garden of Adonis, and Busirane's Masque of Cupid. But there is no gainsaying the beauty which never fails and disappoints, open the poem where you will. There is no gainsaying its variety, often so unexpected and novel. Face to face with the Epicurean idea of beauty and pleasure is the counter-charm of purity, truth, and duty. Many poets have done justice to each one separately. Few have shown, with such equal power, why it is that both have their roots in man's divided nature, and struggle, as it were, for the mastery. Which can be said to be the most exquisite in all beauty of imagination, of refined language, of faultless and matchless melody, of these two passages, in which the same image is used for the most opposite purposes;—first, in that song of temptation, the sweetest note in that description of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, which, as a picture of the spells of pleasure, has never been surpassed; and next, to represent that stainless and glorious purity which is the professed object of his admiration and homage. In both the beauty of the rose furnishes the theme of the poet's treatment. In the first, it is the "lovely lay" which meets the knight of Temperance amid the voluptuousness which he is come to assail and punish.

> The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay:
> Ah! see, whoso fayre thing doest faine to see,
> In springing flowre the image of thy day.
> Ah! see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee
> Doth first peepe foorth with bashfull modestee,
> That fairer seemes the lesse ye see her may.
> Lo! see soone after how more bold and free
> Her bared bosome she doth broad display;
> Lo! see soone after how she fades and falls away
>
> So passeth, in the passing of a day,
> Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre;

Ne more doth florish after first decay,
That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre
Of many a lady, and many a Paramowre.
Gather therefore the Rose whilest yet is prime,
For soone comes age that will her pride deflowre;
Gather the Rose of love whilest yet is time,
Whilest loving thou mayst loved be with equall crime.

In the other, it images the power of the will—that ower over circumstance and the storms of passion, to ommand obedience to reason and the moral law, which Iilton sung so magnificently in *Comus*:—

That daintie Rose, the daughter of her Morne,
More deare then life she tendered, whose flowre
The girlond of her honour did adorne:
Ne suffred she the Middayes scorching powre,
Ne the sharp Northerne wind thereon to showre;
But lapped up her silken leaves most chayre,
When so the froward skye began to lowre;
But, soone as calmed was the christall ayre,
She did it fayre dispred and let to florish fayre.

Eternall God, in his almightie powre,
To make ensample of his heavenly grace,
In Paradize whylome did plant this flowre;
Whence he it fetcht out of her native place,
And did in stocke of earthly flesh enrace,
That mortall men her glory should admyre.
In gentle Ladies breste, and bounteous race
Of woman kind, it fayrest Flowre doth spyre,
And beareth fruit of honour and all chast desyre.

Fayre ympes of beautie, whose bright shining beames
Adorne the worlde with like to heavenly light,
And to your willes both royalties and Reames
Subdew, through conquest of your wondrous might,
With this fayre flowre your goodly girlonds dight
Of chastity and vertue virginall,
That shall embellish more your beautie bright,
And crowne your heades with heavenly coronall,
Such as the Angels weare before Gods tribunall!

This sense of beauty, and command of beautiful expression is not seen only in the sweetness of which both these passages are examples. Its range is wide. Spenser had in his nature besides sweetness, his full proportion of the stern and high manliness of his generation; indeed, he was not without its severity, its hardness, its unconsidering and cruel harshness, its contemptuous indifference to suffering and misery when on the wrong side. Noble and heroic ideals captivate him by their attractions. He kindles naturally and genuinely at what proves and draws out men's courage, their self-command, their self-sacrifice. He sympathizes as profoundly with the strangeness of their condition, with the sad surprises in their history and fate, as he gives himself up with little restraint to what is charming and even intoxicating in it. He can moralize with the best in terse and deep-reaching apophthegms of melancholy or even despairing experience. He can appreciate the mysterious depths and awful outlines of theology—of what our own age can see nothing in, but a dry and scholastic dogmatism. His great contemporaries were, more perhaps than the men of any age, many-sided. He shared their nature; and he used all that he had of sensitiveness and of imaginative and creative power, in bringing out its manifold aspects, and sometimes contradictory feelings and aims. Not that beauty, even varied beauty, is the uninterrupted attribute of his work. It alternates with much that no indulgence can call beautiful. It passes but too easily into what is commonplace, or forced, or unnatural, or extravagant, or careless and poor, or really coarse and bad. He was a negligent corrector. He only at times gave himself the trouble to condense and concentrate. But for all this, the *Faery Queen* glows and is ablaze with beauty; and that beauty is so rich, so

real, and so uncommon, that for its sake the severest readers of Spenser have pardoned much that is discordant with it, much that in the reading has wasted their time and disappointed them.

There is one portion of the beauty of the *Faery Queen*, which in its perfection and fulness had never yet been reached in English poetry. This was the music and melody of his verse. It was this wonderful, almost unfailing sweetness of numbers which probably as much as anything set the *Faery Queen* at once above all contemporary poetry. The English language is really a musical one, and say what people will, the English ear is very susceptible to the infinite delicacy and suggestiveness of musical rhythm and cadence. Spenser found the secret of it. The art has had many and consummate masters since, as different in their melody as in their thoughts from Spenser. And others at the time, Shakespere pre-eminently, heard, only a little later, the same grandeur, and the same subtle beauty in the sounds of their mother-tongue, only waiting the artist's skill to be combined and harmonized into strains of mysterious fascination. But Spenser was the first to show that he had acquired a command over what had hitherto been heard only in exquisite fragments, passing too soon into roughness and confusion. It would be too much to say that his cunning never fails, that his ear is never dull or off its guard. But when the length and magnitude of the composition are considered, with the restraints imposed by the new nine-line stanza, however convenient it may have been, the vigour, the invention, the volume and rush of language, and the keenness and truth of ear amid its diversified tasks are indeed admirable, which could keep up so prolonged and so majestic a stream of

original and varied poetical melody. If his stanzas are monotonous, it is with the grand monotony of the sea-shore, where billow follows billow, each swelling diversely, and broken into different curves and waves upon its mounting surface, till at last it falls over, and spreads and rushes up in a last long line of foam upon the beach.

3. But all this is but the outside shell and the fancy framework in which the substance of the poem is enclosed. Its substance is the poet's philosophy of life. It shadows forth, in type and parable, his ideal of the perfection of the human character, with its special features, its trials, its achievements. There were two accepted forms in poetry in which this had been done by poets. One was under the image of warfare. The other was under the image of a journey or voyage. Spenser chose the former, as Dante and Bunyan chose the latter. Spenser looks on the scene of the world as a continual battle-field. It was such in fact to his experience in Ireland, testing the mettle of character, its loyalty, its sincerity, its endurance. His picture of character is by no means painted with sentimental tenderness. He portrays it in the rough work of the struggle and the toil, always hardly tested by trial, often overmatched, deceived, defeated, and even delivered by its own default to disgrace and captivity. He had full before his eyes what abounded in the society of his day, often in its noblest representatives—the strange perplexing mixture of the purer with the baser elements, in the high-tempered and aspiring activity of his time. But it was an ideal of character which had in it high aims and serious purposes, which was armed with fortitude and strength, which could recover itself after failure and defeat.

The unity of a story, or an allegory—that chain and

backbone of continuous interest, implying a progress and leading up to a climax, which holds together the great poems of the world, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Æneid*, the *Commedia*, the *Paradise Lost*, the *Jerusalem Delivered*—this is wanting in the *Faery Queen*. The unity is one of character and its ideal. That character of the completed man, raised above what is poor and low, and governed by noble tempers and pure principles, has in Spenser two conspicuous elements. In the first place, it is based on manliness. In the personages which illustrate the different virtues, Holiness, Justice, Courtesy, and the rest, the distinction is not in nicely discriminated features or shades of expression, but in the trials and the occasions which call forth a particular action or effort: yet the manliness which is at the foundation of all that is good in them is a universal quality common to them all, rooted and imbedded in the governing idea or standard of moral character in the poem. It is not merely courage, it is not merely energy, it is not merely strength. It is the quality of soul which frankly accepts the conditions in human life, of labour, of obedience, of effort, of unequal success, which does not quarrel with them or evade them, but takes for granted with unquestioning alacrity that man is called—by his call to high aims and destiny —to a continual struggle with difficulty, with pain, with evil, and makes it the point of honour not to be dismayed or wearied out by them. It is a cheerful and serious willingness for hard work and endurance, as being inevitable and very bearable necessities, together with even a pleasure in encountering trials which put a man on his mettle, an enjoyment of the contest and the risk, even in play. It is the quality which seizes on the paramount idea of duty, as something which leaves a man no choice; which

despises and breaks through the inferior considerations and motives—trouble, uncertainty, doubt, curiosity—which hang about and impede duty; which is impatient with the idleness and childishness of a life of mere amusement, or mere looking on, of continued and self-satisfied levity, of vacillation, of clever and ingenious trifling. Spenser's manliness is quite consistent with long pauses of rest, with intervals of change, with great craving for enjoyment—nay, with great lapses from its ideal, with great mixtures of selfishness, with coarseness, with licentiousness, with injustice and inhumanity. It may be fatally diverted into bad channels; it may degenerate into a curse and scourge to the world. But it stands essentially distinct from the nature which shrinks from difficulty, which is appalled at effort, which has no thought of making an impression on things around it, which is content with passively receiving influences and distinguishing between emotions, which feels no call to exert itself, because it recognizes no aim valuable enough to rouse it, and no obligation strong enough to command it. In the character of his countrymen round him, in its highest and in its worst features, in its noble ambition, its daring enterprise, its self-devotion, as well as in its pride, its intolerance, its fierce self-will, its arrogant claims of superiority, moral, political, religious, Spenser saw the example of that strong and resolute manliness, which, once set on great things, feared nothing—neither toil nor disaster nor danger, in their pursuit. Naturally and unconsciously, he laid it at the bottom of all his portraitures of noble and virtuous achievement in the *Faery Queen*.

All Spenser's "virtues" spring from a root of manliness. Strength, simplicity of aim, elevation of spirit, courage are presupposed as their necessary conditions.

But they have with him another condition as universal. They all grow and are nourished from the soil of love; the love of beauty, the love and service of fair women. This of course, is a survival from the ages of chivalry, an inheritance bequeathed from the minstrels of France, Italy, and Germany to the rising poetry of Europe. Spenser's types of manhood are imperfect without the idea of an absorbing and overmastering passion of love; without a devotion, as to the principal and most worthy object of life, to the service of a beautiful lady, and to winning her affection and grace. The influence of this view of life comes out in numberless ways. Love comes on the scene in shapes which are exquisitely beautiful, in all its purity, its tenderness, its unselfishness. But the claims of its all-ruling and irresistible might are also only too readily verified in the passions of men; in the follies of love, its entanglements, its mischiefs, its foulness. In one shape or another it meets us at every turn; it is never absent; it is the motive and stimulant of the whole activity of the poem. The picture of life held up before us is the literal rendering of Coleridge's lines:—

> All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
> Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
> Are all but ministers of Love,
> And feed his sacred flame.

We still think with Spenser about the paramount place of manliness, as the foundation of all worth in human character. We have ceased to think with him about the rightful supremacy of love, even in the imaginative conception of human life. We have ceased to recognize in it the public claims of almost a religion, which it has in Spenser. Love will ever play a great part in human life

to the end of time. It will be an immense element in its happiness, perhaps a still greater one in its sorrows, its disasters, its tragedies. It is still an immense power in shaping and colouring it, both in fiction and reality; in the family, in the romance, in the fatalities and the prosaic ruin of vulgar fact. But the place given to it by Spenser is to our thoughts and feelings even ludicrously extravagant. An enormous change has taken place in the ideas of society on this point: it is one of the things which make a wide chasm between centuries and generations which yet are of "the same passions," and have in temper, tradition and language, so much in common. The ages of the Courts of Love, whom Chaucer reflected and whose ideas passed on through him to Spenser, are to us simply strange and abnormal states through which society has passed, to us beyond understanding and almost belief. The perpetual love-making, as one of the first duties and necessities of a noble life, the space which it must fill in the cares and thoughts of all gentle and high-reaching spirits, the unrestrained language of admiration and worship, the unrestrained yielding to the impulses, the anxieties, the pitiable despair and agonies of love, the subordination to it of all other pursuits and aims, the weeping and wailing and self-torturing which it involves, all this is so far apart from what we know of actual life, the life not merely of work and business, but the life of affection, and even of passion, that it makes the picture of which it is so necessary a part, seem to us in the last degree, unreal, unimaginable, grotesquely ridiculous. The quaint love sometimes found among children, so quickly kindled, so superficial, so violent in its language and absurd in its plans, is transferred with the utmost gravity to the serious proceedings of the wise

and good. In the highest characters it is chastened, refined, purified: it appropriates, indeed, language due only to the divine, it almost simulates idolatry; yet it belongs to the best part of man's nature. But in the lower and average characters, it is not so respectable; it is apt to pass into mere toying pastime and frivolous love of pleasure: it astonishes us often by the readiness with which it displays an affinity for the sensual and impure, the corrupting and debasing sides of the relations between the sexes. But however it appears, it is throughout a very great affair, not merely with certain persons, or under certain circumstances, but with every one: it obtrudes itself in public, as the natural and recognized motive of plans of life and trials of strength; it is the great spur of enterprise, and its highest and most glorious reward. A world of which this is the law, is not even in fiction a world which we can conceive possible, or with which experience enables us to sympathize.

It is, of course, a purely artificial and conventional reading of the facts of human life and feeling. Such conventional readings and renderings belong in a measure to all art; but in its highest forms they are corrected, interpreted, supplemented by the presence of interspersed realities which every one recognizes. But it was one of Spenser's disadvantages, that two strong influences combined to entangle him in this fantastic and grotesque way of exhibiting the play and action of the emotions of love. This all-absorbing, all-embracing passion of love, at least, this way of talking about it, was the fashion of the Court. Further, it was the fashion of poetry, which he inherited; and he was not the man to break through the strong bands of custom and authority. In very much he was an imitator. He took what he found; what was

his own was his treatment of it. He did not trouble himself with inconsistencies, or see absurdities and incongruities. Habit and familiar language made it not strange that in the Court of Elizabeth, the most high-flown sentiments should be in every one's mouth about the sublimities and refinements of love, while every one was busy with keen ambition, and unscrupulous intrigue. The same blinding power kept him from seeing the monstrous contrast between the claims of the queen to be the ideal of womanly purity—claims recognized and echoed in ten thousand extravagant compliments—and the real licentiousness common all round her among her favourites. All these strange contradictions, which surprise and shock us, Spenser assumed as natural. He built up his fictions on them, as the dramatist built on a basis, which, though more nearly approaching to real life, yet differed widely from it in many of its preliminary and collateral suppositions; or as the novelist builds up his on a still closer adherence to facts and experience. In this matter Spenser appears with a kind of double self. At one time he speaks as one penetrated and inspired by the highest and purest ideas of love, and filled with aversion and scorn for the coarser forms of passion—for what is ensnaring and treacherous, as well as for what is odious and foul. At another, he puts forth all his power to bring out its most dangerous and even debasing aspects in highly coloured pictures, which none could paint without keen sympathy with what he takes such pains to make vivid and fascinating. The combination is not like anything modern, for both the elements are in Spenser so unquestionably and simply genuine. Our modern poets are, with all their variations in this respect, more homogeneous; and where one conception of love and beauty has taken hold of a

man, the other does not easily come in. It is impossible to imagine Wordsworth dwelling with zest on visions and imagery, on which Spenser has lavished all his riches. There can be no doubt of Byron's real habits of thought and feeling on subjects of this kind, even when his language for the occasion is the chastest; we detect in it the mood of the moment, perhaps spontaneous, perhaps put on, but in contradiction to the whole movement of the man's true nature. But Spenser's words do not ring hollow. With a kind of unconsciousness and innocence, which we now find hard to understand, and which perhaps belongs to the early childhood or boyhood of a literature, he passes abruptly from one standard of thought and feeling to another; and is quite as much in earnest when he is singing the pure joys of chastened affections, as he is when he is writing with almost riotous luxuriance what we are at this day ashamed to read. Tardily, indeed, he appears to have acknowledged the contradiction. At the instance of two noble ladies of the Court, he composed two Hymns of Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty, to "retract" and "reform" two earlier ones composed in praise of earthly love and beauty. But, characteristically, he published the two pieces together, side by side in the same volume.

In the *Faery Queen*, Spenser has brought out, not the image of the great Gloriana, but in its various aspects, a form of character which was then just coming on the stage of the world, and which has played a great part in it since. As he has told us, he aimed at presenting before us, in the largest sense of the word, the English gentleman. It was as a whole a new character in the world. It had not really existed in the days of feudalism and chivalry, though features of it had appeared, and its

descent was traced from those times: but they were too wild and coarse, too turbulent and disorderly, for a character which, however ready for adventure and battle, looked to peace, refinement, order, and law as the true conditions of its perfection. In the days of Elizabeth it was beginning to fill a large place in English life. It was formed amid the increasing cultivation of the nation, the increasing varieties of public service, the awakening responsibilities to duty and calls to self-command. Still making much of the prerogative of noble blood and family honours, it was something independent of nobility and beyond it. A nobleman might have in him the making of a gentleman: but it was the man himself of whom the gentleman was made. Great birth, even great capacity, were not enough; there must be added a new delicacy of conscience, a new appreciation of what is beautiful and worthy of honour, a new measure of the strength and nobleness of self-control, of devotion to unselfish interests. This idea of manhood, based not only on force and courage, but on truth, on refinement, on public spirit, on soberness and modesty, on consideration for others, was taking possession of the younger generation of Elizabeth's middle years. Of course the idea was very imperfectly apprehended, still more imperfectly realized. But it was something which on the same scale had not been yet, and which was to be the seed of something greater. It was to grow into those strong, simple, noble characters, pure in aim and devoted to duty, the Falklands, the Hampdens, who amid so much evil form such a remarkable feature in the Civil Wars, both on the Royalist and the Parliamentary sides. It was to grow into that high type of cultivated English nature, in the present and the last century, common both

to its monarchical and its democratic embodiments, than which, with all its faults and defects, our western civilization has produced few things more admirable.

There were three distinguished men of that time, who one after another were Spenser's friends and patrons, and who were men in whom he saw realized his conceptions of human excellence and nobleness. They were Sir Philip Sidney, Lord Grey of Wilton, and Sir Walter Ralegh: and the *Faery Queen* reflects, as in a variety of separate mirrors and spiritualized forms, the characteristics of these men and of such as they. It reflects their conflicts, their temptations, their weaknesses, the evils they fought with, the superiority with which they towered over meaner and poorer natures. Sir Philip Sidney may be said to have been the first typical example in English society of the true gentleman. The charm which attracted men to him in life, the fame which he left behind him, are not to be accounted for simply by his accomplishments as a courtier, a poet, a lover of literature, a gallant soldier; above all this there was something not found in the strong or brilliant men about him, a union and harmony of all high qualities differing from any of them separately, which gave a fire of its own to his literary enthusiasm, and a sweetness of its own to his courtesy. Spenser's admiration for that bright but short career was strong and lasting. Sidney was to him a verification of what he aspired to and imagined; a pledge that he was not dreaming, in portraying Prince Arthur's greatness of soul, the religious chivalry of the Red Cross Knight of Holiness, the manly purity and self-control of Sir Guyon. It is too much to say that in Prince Arthur, the hero of the poem, he always intended Sidney. In the first place, it is clear that under that character Spenser in places pays compli-

ments to Leicester, in whose service he began life, and whose claims on his homage he ever recognized. Prince Arthur is certainly Leicester, in the historical passages in the Fifth Book relating to the war in the Low Countries in 1576: and no one can be meant but Leicester in the bold allusion in the First Book (ix. 17) to Elizabeth's supposed thoughts of marrying him. In the next place, allegory, like caricature, is not bound to make the same person and the same image always or perfectly coincide; and Spenser makes full use of this liberty. But when he was painting the picture of the Kingly Warrior, in whom was to be summed up in a magnificent unity the diversified graces of other men, and who was to be ever ready to help and support his fellows in their hour of need, and in their conflict with evil, he certainly had before his mind the well-remembered lineaments of Sidney's high and generous nature. And he further dedicated a separate book, the last that he completed, to the celebration of Sidney's special "virtue" of Courtesy. The martial strain of the poem changes once more to the pastoral of the *Shepherd's Calendar* to describe Sidney's wooing of Frances Walsingham, the fair Pastorella; his conquests by his sweetness and grace over the churlishness of rivals; and his triumphant war against the monster spirit of ignorant and loud-tongued insolence, the "Blatant Beast" of religious, political, and social slander.

Again, in Lord Grey of Wilton, gentle by nature, but so stern in the hour of trial, called reluctantly to cope not only with anarchy, but with intrigue and disloyalty, finding selfishness and thanklessness everywhere, but facing all and doing his best with a heavy heart, and ending his days prematurely under detraction and disgrace, Spenser had before him a less complete character

than Sidney, but yet one of grand and severe manliness, in which were conspicuous a religious hatred of disorder, and an unflinching sense of public duty. Spenser's admiration of him was sincere and earnest. In his case the allegory almost becomes history. Arthur, Lord Grey, is Sir Arthegal, the Knight of Justice. The story touches apparently on some passages of his career, when his dislike of the French marriage placed him in opposition to the Queen, and even for a time threw him with the supporters of Mary. But the adventures of Arthegal mainly preserve the memory of Lord Grey's terrible exploits against wrong and rebellion in Ireland. These exploits are represented in the doings of the iron man Talus, his squire, with his destroying flail, swift, irresistible, inexorable; a figure borrowed and altered, after Spenser's wont, from a Greek legend. His overthrow of insolent giants, his annihilation of swarming "rascal routs," idealize and glorify that unrelenting policy, of which, though condemned in England, Spenser continued to be the advocate. In the story of Arthegal, long separated by undeserved misfortunes from the favour of the armed lady, Britomart, the virgin champion of right, of whom he was so worthy, doomed in spite of his honours to an early death, and assailed on his return from his victorious service by the furious insults of envy and malice, Spenser portrays almost without a veil, the hard fate of the unpopular patron whom he to the last defended and honoured.

Ralegh, his last protector, the Shepherd of the Ocean, to whose judgment he referred the work of his life, and under whose guidance he once more tried the quicksands of the Court, belonged to a different class from Sidney or Lord Grey; but of his own class he

was the consummate and matchless example. He had not Sidney's fine enthusiasm and nobleness; he had not either Sidney's affectations. He had not Lord Grey's single-minded hatred of wrong. He was a man to whom his own interests were much; he was unscrupulous; he was ostentatious; he was not above stooping to mean, unmanly compliances with the humours of the Queen. But he was a man with a higher ideal than he attempted to follow. He saw, not without cynical scorn, through the shows and hollowness of the world. His intellect was of that clear and unembarrassed power which takes in as wholes things which other men take in part by part. And he was in its highest form a representative of that spirit of adventure into the unknown and the wonderful of which Drake was the coarser and rougher example, realizing in serious earnest, on the sea and in the New World, the life of knight-errantry feigned in romances. With Ralegh, as with Lord Grey, Spenser comes to history; and he even seems to have been moved, as the poem went on, partly by pity, partly by amusement, to shadow forth in his imaginary world, not merely Ralegh's brilliant qualities, but also his frequent misadventures and mischances in his career at Court. Of all her favourites Ralegh was the one whom his wayward mistress seemed to find most delight in tormenting. The offence which he gave by his secret marriage suggested the scenes describing the utter desolation of Prince Arthur's squire, Timias, at the jealous wrath of the Virgin Huntress, Belphœbe,—scenes, which extravagant as they are, can hardly be called a caricature of Ralegh's real behaviour in the Tower in 1593. But Spenser is not satisfied with this one picture. In the last Book Timias appears again, the victim of slander and ill-usage, even after he had

recovered Belphœbe's favour; he is baited like a wild bull, by mighty powers of malice, falsehood, and calumny; he is wounded by the tooth of the Blatant Beast; and after having been cured, not without difficulty, and not without significant indications on the part of the poet that his friend had need to restrain and chasten his unruly spirit, he is again delivered over to an ignominious captivity, and the insults of Disdain and Scorn.

> Then up he made him rise, and forward fare,
> Led in a rope which both his hands did bynd;
> Ne ought that foole for pity did him spare,
> But with his whip, him following behynd,
> Him often scourg'd, and forst his feete to fynd:
> And other-whiles with bitter mockes and mowes
> He would him scorne, that to his gentle mynd
> Was much more grievous then the others blowes:
> Words sharpely wound, but greatest griefe of scorning growes.

Spenser knew Ralegh only in the promise of his adventurous prime—so buoyant and fearless, so inexhaustible in project and resource, so unconquerable by checks and reverses. The gloomier portion of Ralegh's career was yet to come: its intrigues, its grand yet really gambling and unscrupulous enterprises, the long years of prison and authorship, and its not unfitting close, in the English statesman's death by the headsman—so tranquil though violent, so ceremoniously solemn, so composed, so dignified;—such a contrast to all other forms of capital punishment, then or since.

Spenser has been compared to Pindar, and contrasted with Cervantes. The contrast, in point of humour, and the truth that humour implies, is favourable to the Spaniard: in point of moral earnestness and sense of poetic beauty, to the Englishman. What Cervantes only

thought ridiculous Spenser used, and not in vain, for a high purpose. The ideas of knight-errantry were really more absurd than Spenser allowed himself to see. But that idea of the gentleman which they suggested, that picture of human life as a scene of danger, trial, effort, defeat, recovery, which they lent themselves to image forth, was more worth insisting on, than the exposure of their folly and extravagance. There was nothing to be made of them, Cervantes thought; and nothing to be done, but to laugh off what they had left, among living Spaniards, of pompous imbecility or mistaken pretensions. Spenser, knowing that they must die, yet believed that out of them might be raised something nobler and more real, enterprise, duty, resistance to evil, refinement, hatred of the mean and base. The energetic and high-reaching manhood which he saw in the remarkable personages round him he shadowed forth in the *Faery Queen*. He idealized the excellences and the trials of this first generation of English gentlemen, as Bunyan afterwards idealized the piety, the conflicts, and the hopes of Puritan religion. Neither were universal types; neither were perfect. The manhood in which Spenser delights, with all that was admirable and attractive in it, had still much of boyish incompleteness and roughness: it had noble aims, it had generosity, it had loyalty, it had a very real reverence for purity and religion; but it was young in experience of a new world, it was wanting in self-mastery, it was often pedantic and self-conceited; it was an easier prey than it ought to have been to discreditable temptations. And there is a long interval between any of Spenser's superficial and thin conceptions of character and such deep and subtle creations as Hamlet or Othello, just as Bunyan's strong but narrow ideals of religion,

true as they are up to a certain point, fall short of the length and breadth and depth of what Christianity has made of man, and may yet make of him. But in the ways which Spenser chose, he will always delight and teach us. The spectacle of what is heroic and self-devoted, of honour for principle and truth, set before us with so much insight and sympathy, and combined with so much just and broad observation on those accidents and conditions of our mortal state which touch us all, will never appeal to English readers in vain, till we have learned a new language, and adopted new canons of art, of taste, and of morals. It is not merely that he has left imperishable images which have taken their place among the consecrated memorials of poetry and the household thoughts of all cultivated men. But he has permanently lifted the level of English poetry by a great and sustained effort of rich and varied art, in which one main purpose rules, loyalty to what is noble and pure, and in which this main purpose subordinates to itself every feature and every detail, and harmonizes some that by themselves seem least in keeping with it.

CHAPTER VI.

SECOND PART OF THE FAERY QUEEN.—SPENSER'S LAST YEARS (1590—1599).

THE publication of the *Faery Queen* in 1590 had made the new poet of the *Shepherd's Calendar* a famous man. He was no longer merely the favourite of a knot of enthusiastic friends, and outside of them only recognized and valued at his true measure by such judges as Sidney and Ralegh. By the common voice of all the poets of his time he was now acknowledged as the first of living English poets. It is not easy for us, who live in these late times and are familiar with so many literary masterpieces, to realize the surprise of a first and novel achievement in literature; the effect on an age, long and eagerly seeking after poetical expression, of the appearance at last of a work of such power, richness, and finished art.

It can scarcely be doubted, I think, from the bitter sarcasms interspersed in his later poems, that Spenser expected more from his triumph than it brought him. It opened no way of advancement for him in England. He continued for a while in that most ungrateful and unsatisfactory employment, the service of the State in Ireland; and that he relinquished in 1593.[5] At the end

[5] Who is *Edmondus Spenser, Prebendary of Effin* (Elphin)? in a list of arrears of first fruits; Calendar of State Papers, *Ireland*,

of 1591 he was again at Kilcolman. He had written and probably sent to Ralegh, though he did not publish it till 1595, the record already quoted of the last two year's events, *Colin Clout's come home again*,—his visit, under Ralegh's guidance, to the Court, his thoughts and recollections of its great ladies, his generous criticisms on poets, the people and courtiers whom he had seen and heard of; how he had been dazzled, how he had been disenchanted, and how he was come home to his Irish mountains and streams and lakes, to enjoy their beauty, though in a "salvage" and "foreign" land; to find in this peaceful and tranquil retirement something far better than the heat of ambition and the intrigues of envious rivalries; and to contrast with the profanations of the name of love which had disgusted him in a dissolute society, the higher and purer ideal of it which he could honour and pursue in the simplicity of his country life.

And in Ireland, the rejected adorer of the Rosalind of the *Shepherd's Calendar* found another and still more perfect Rosalind, who, though she was at first inclined to repeat the cruelty of the earlier one, in time relented, and received such a dower of poetic glory as few poets have bestowed upon their brides. It has always appeared strange that Spenser's passion for the first Rosalind should have been so lasting, that in his last pastoral, *Colin Clout's come home again*, written so late as 1591, and published after he was married, he should end his poem by reverting to this long-past love passage, defending her on the ground of her incomparable excellence

Dec. 8, 1586, p. 222. Church preferments were under special circumstances allowed to be held by laymen. See the Queen's "Instructions," 1579; in Preface to Calendar of Carew MSS. 1589—1600, p. ci.

and his own unworthiness, against the blame of friendly "shepherds," witnesses of the "languors of his too long dying," and angry with her hard-heartedness. It may be that, according to Spenser's way of making his masks and figures suggest but not fully express their antitypes,[1] Rosalind here bears the image of the real mistress of this time, the "country lass," the Elizabeth of the sonnets, who was, in fact, for a while as unkind as the earlier Rosalind. The history of this later wooing, its hopes and anguish, its varying currents, its final unexpected success, is the subject of a collection of Sonnets, which have the disadvantage of provoking comparison with the Sonnets of Shakespere. There is no want in them of grace and sweetness, and they ring true with genuine feeling and warm affection, though they have of course their share of the conceits then held proper for love poems. But they want the power and fire, as well as the perplexing mystery, of those of the greater master. His bride was also immortalized as a fourth among the three Graces, in a richly-painted passage in the last book of the *Faery Queen*. But the most magnificent tribute to her is the great Wedding Ode, the *Epithalamion*, the finest composition of its kind, probably, in any language: so impetuous and unflagging, so orderly and yet so rapid in the onward march of its stately and varied stanzas; so passionate, so flashing with imaginative wealth, yet so refined and self-restrained. It was always easy for Spenser to open the floodgates of his inexhaustible fancy. With him,—

> The numbers flow as fast as spring doth rise.

[1] "In these kind of historical allusions Spenser usually perplexes the subject: he leads you on, and then designedly misleads you."—Upton, quoted by Craik, iii. 92.

But here he has thrown into his composition all his power of concentration, of arrangement, of strong and harmonious government over thought and image, over language and measure and rhythm; and the result is unquestionably one of the grandest lyrics in English poetry. We have learned to think the subject unfit for such free poetical treatment; Spenser's age did not.

Of the lady of whom all this was said, and for whom all this was written, the family name has not been thought worth preserving. We know that by her Christian name she was a namesake of the great queen, and of Spenser's mother. She is called a country lass, which may mean anything; and the marriage appears to have been solemnized in Cork, on what was then Midsummer Day, "Barnaby the Bright," the day when "the sun is in his cheerful height," June $\frac{11}{12}$, 1594. Except that she survived Spenser, that she married again, and had some legal quarrels with one of her own sons about his lands, we know nothing more about her. Of two of the children whom she brought him, the names have been preserved, and they indicate that in spite of love and poetry, and the charms of Kilcolman, Spenser felt as Englishmen feel in Australia or in India. To call one of them *Sylvanus*, and the other *Peregrine*, reveals to us that Ireland was still to him a "salvage land," and he a pilgrim and stranger in it; as Moses called his firstborn Gershom, a stranger here—"for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land."

In the year after his marriage, he sent over these memorials of it to be published in London, and they were entered at Stationers' Hall in November, 1595. The same year he came over himself, bringing with him the second instalment of the *Faery Queen*, which was entered for publication the following January, $159\frac{5}{6}$. Thus the half

of the projected work was finished; and finished, as we know from one of the Sonnets (80), before his marriage. After his long "race through Fairy land," he asks leave to rest, and solace himself with his "love's sweet praise;" and then "as a steed refreshed after toil," he will "stoutly that second worke assoyle." The first six books were published together in 1596. He remained most of the year in London, during which *The Four Hymns on Love and Beauty, Earthly and Heavenly*, were published; and also a Dirge (*Daphnaida*) on Douglas Howard, the wife of Arthur Gorges, the spirited narrator of the Island Voyage of Essex and Ralegh, written in 1591; and a "spousal verse" (*Prothalamion*), on the marriage of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester, late in 1596. But he was only a visitor in London. The *Prothalamion* contains a final record of his disappointments in England.

> I, (whom sullein care,
> Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay
> In Princes Court, and expectation vayne
> Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
> Like empty shaddowes, did afflict my brayne,)
> Walkt forth to ease my payne
> Along the shoare of silver streaming Themmes—

His marriage ought to have made him happy. He professed to find the highest enjoyment in the quiet and retirement of country life. He was in the prime of life, successful beyond all his fellows in his special work, and apparently with unabated interest in what remained to be done of it. And though he could not but feel himself at a distance from the "sweet civility" of England, and socially at disadvantage compared to those whose lines had fallen to them in its pleasant places, yet nature,

which he loved so well, was still friendly to him, if men were wild and dangerous. He is never weary of praising the natural advantages of Ireland. Speaking of the North, he says,—

> And sure it is yet a most beautifull and sweet countrey as any is under heaven, seamed throughout with many goodly rivers, replenished with all sortes of fish, most aboundantly sprinckled with many sweet Ilandes, and goodly lakes, like litle Inland Seas, that will carry even ships upon theyr waters, adorned with goodly woodes fitt for building of howses and shippes, soe comodiously, as that yf some princes in the world had them, they would soone hope to be lordes of all the seas, and ere long of all the world; also full of good portes and havens opening upon England and Scotland, as inviting us to come to them, to see what excellent comodityes that countrey can affoord, besides the soyle it self most fertile, fitt to yeeld all kind of fruite that shal be comitted therunto. And lastly, the heavens most milde and temperat, though somewhat more moyst then the part toward the West.

His own home at Kilcolman charmed and delighted him. It was not his fault that its trout streams, its Mulla and Fanchin, are not as famous as Walter Scott's Teviot and Tweed, or Wordsworth's Yarrow and Duddon, or that its hills, Old Mole, and Arlo Hill, have not kept a poetic name like Helvellyn and "Eildon's triple height." They have failed to become familiar names to us. But the beauties of his home inspired more than one sweet pastoral picture in the *Faery Queen;* and in the last fragment remaining to us of it, he celebrates his mountains and woods and valleys as once the fabled resort of the Divine Huntress and her Nymphs, and the meeting-place of the Gods.

There was one drawback to the enjoyment of his Irish country life, and of the natural attractiveness of Kilcolman.

"Who knows not Arlo Hill?" he exclaims, in the scene just referred to from the fragment on *Mutability*. "Arlo, the best and fairest hill in all the holy island's heights." It was well known to all Englishmen who had to do with the South of Ireland. How well it was known in the Irish history of the time, may be seen in the numerous references to it, under various forms, such as Aharlo, Harlow, in the Index to the Irish Calendar of Papers of this troublesome date, and to continual encounters and ambushes in its notoriously dangerous woods. He means by it the highest part of the Galtee range, below which to the north, through a glen or defile, runs the "river Aherlow." Galtymore, the summit, rises, with precipice and gully, more than 3000 feet, above the plains of Tipperary, and is seen far and wide. It was connected with the "great wood," the wild region of forest, mountain, and bog which stretched half across Munster from the Suir to the Shannon. It was the haunt and fastness of Irish outlawry and rebellion in the South, which so long sheltered Desmond and his followers. Arlo and its "fair forests," harbouring "thieves and wolves," was an uncomfortable neighbour to Kilcolman. The poet describes it as ruined by a curse pronounced on the lovely land by the offended goddess of the Chase,—

> Which too too true that land's in-dwellers since have found.

He was not only living in an insecure part, on the very border of disaffection and disturbance, but like every Englishman living in Ireland, he was living amid ruins. An English home in Ireland, however fair, was a home on the sides of Ætna or Vesuvius: it stood where the lava flood had once passed, and upon not distant fires. Spenser has left us his thoughts on the condition of Ireland, in a *paper* written between the two rebellions, some time be-

tween 1595 and 1598, after the twelve or thirteen years of so-called peace which followed the overthrow of Desmond, and when Tyrone's rebellion was becoming serious. It seems to have been much copied in manuscript, but though entered for publication in 1598, it was not printed till long after his death in 1633. A copy of it among the Irish papers of 1598 shows that it had come under the eyes of the English Government. It is full of curious observations, of shrewd political remarks, of odd and confused ethnography; but more than all this, it is a very vivid and impressive picture of what Sir Walter Ralegh called "the common woe of Ireland." It is a picture of a noble realm, which its inhabitants and its masters did not know what to do with; a picture of hopeless mistakes, misunderstandings, misrule; a picture of piteous misery and suffering on the part of a helpless and yet untameable and mischievous population—of unrelenting and scornful rigour on the part of their stronger rulers, which yet was absolutely ineffectual to reclaim or subdue them. "Men of great wisdom," Spenser writers, "have often wished that all that land were a sea-pool." Everything, people thought, had been tried, and tried in vain.

> Marry, soe there have beene divers good plottes and wise counsells cast alleready about reformation of that realme; but they say, it is the fatall desteny of that land, that noe purposes, whatsoever are meant for her good, will prosper or take good effect, which, whether it proceede from the very GENIUS of the soyle, or influence of the starres, or that Allmighty God hath not yet appoynted the time of her reformation, or that He reserveth her in this unquiett state still for some secrett scourdge, which shall by her come unto England, it is hard to be knowen, but yet much to be feared.

The unchanging fatalities of Ireland appear in Spenser's account in all their well-known forms; some of them, as if

they were what we were reading of yesterday. Throughout the work there is a honest zeal for order, an honest hatred of falsehood, sloth, treachery, and disorder. But there does not appear a trace of consideration for what the Irish might feel or desire or resent. He is sensible indeed of English mismanagement and vacillation, of the way in which money and force were wasted by not being boldly and intelligently employed; he enlarges on that power of malignity and detraction which he has figured in the Blatant Beast of the *Faery Queen:* but of English cruelty, of English injustice, of English rapacity, of English prejudice, he is profoundly unconscious. He only sees that things are getting worse and more dangerous; and though he, like others, has his "plot" for the subjugation and pacification of the island, and shrinks from nothing in the way of severity, not even, if necessary, from extermination, his outlook is one of deep despair. He calculates the amount of force, of money, of time, necessary to break down all resistance: he is minute and perhaps skilful in building his forts and disposing his garrisons; he is very earnest about the necessity of cutting broad roads through the woods, and building bridges in place of fords; he contemplates restored churches, parish schools, a better order of clergy. But where the spirit was to come from of justice, of conciliation, of steady and firm resistance to corruption and selfishness, he gives us no light. What it comes to is, that with patience, temper, and public spirit, Ireland might be easily reformed and brought into order: but unless he hoped for patience, temper, and public spirit from Lord Essex, to whom he seems to allude as the person "on whom the eye of England is fixed, and our last hopes now rest," he too easily took for granted what was the real difficulty. His picture

is exact and forcible, of one side of the truth; it seems beyond the thought of an honest, well-informed, and noble-minded Englishman that there was another side.

But he was right in his estimate of the danger, and of the immediate evils which produced it. He was right in thinking that want of method, want of control, want of confidence, and an untimely parsimony, prevented severity from having a fair chance of preparing a platform for reform and conciliation. He was right in his conviction of the inveterate treachery of the Irish Chiefs, partly the result of ages of mismanagement, but now incurable. While he was writing, Tyrone, a craftier and bolder man than Desmond, was taking up what Desmond had failed in. He was playing a game with the English authorities which as things then were is almost beyond belief. He was outwitting or cajoling the veterans of Irish government, who knew perfectly well what he was, and yet let him amuse them with false expectations—men like Sir John Norreys, who broke his heart when he found out how Tyrone had baffled and made a fool of him. Wishing to gain time for help from Spain, and to extend the rebellion, he revolted, submitted, sued for pardon but did not care to take it when granted, fearlessly presented himself before the English officers while he was still beleaguering their posts, led the English forces a chase through mountains and bogs, inflicted heavy losses on them, and yet managed to keep negotiations open as long as it suited him. From 1594 to 1598, the rebellion had been gaining ground; it had crept round from Ulster to Connaught, from Connaught to Leinster, and now from Connaught to the borders of Munster. But Munster, with its English landlords and settlers, was still on the whole quiet. At the end of 1597, the Council at

Dublin reported home that "Munster was the best tempered of all the rest at this present time; for that though not long since sundry loose persons" (among them the base sons of Lord Roche, Spenser's adversary in land suits) "became Robin Hoods and slew some of the undertakers, dwelling scattered in thatched houses and remote places near to woods and fastnesses, yet now they are cut off, and no known disturbers left who are like to make any dangerous alteration on the sudden." But they go on to add that they "have intelligence that many are practised withal from the North, to be of combination with the rest, and stir coals in Munster, whereby the whole realm might be in a general uproar." And they repeat their opinion that they must be prepared for a "universal Irish war, intended to shake off all English government."

In April, 1598, Tyrone received a new pardon; in the following August, he surprised an English army near Armagh, and shattered it with a defeat, the bloodiest and most complete ever received by the English in Ireland. Then the storm burst. Tyrone sent a force into Munster: and once more Munster rose. It was a rising of the dispossessed proprietors and the whole native population against the English undertakers; a "ragged number of rogues and boys," as the English Council describes them; rebel kernes, pouring out of the "great wood," and from Arlo, the "chief fastness of the rebels." Even the chiefs, usually on good terms with the English, could not resist the stream. Even Thomas Norreys, the President, was surprised, and retired to Cork, bringing down on himself a severe reprimand from the English Government. "You might better have resisted than you did, considering the many defensible houses and castles possessed by the undertakers, who, for aught we can hear, were by no means com-

forted nor supported by you, but either from lack of comfort from you, or out of mere cowardice, fled away from the rebels on the first alarm." "Whereupon," says Cox, the Irish historian, "the Munsterians, generally, rebel in October, and kill, murder, ravish and spoil without mercy; and Tyrone made James Fitz-Thomas, Earl of Desmond, on condition to be tributary to him; he was the handsomest man of his time, and is commonly called the *Sugan* Earl."

On the last day of the previous September (Sept. 30, 1598), the English Council had written to the Irish Government to appoint Edmund Spenser, Sheriff of the County of Cork, "a gentleman dwelling in the County of Cork, who is so well known unto you all for his good and commendable parts, being a man endowed with good knowledge in learning, and not unskilful or without experience in the wars." In October, Munster was in the hands of the insurgents, who were driving Norreys before them, and sweeping out of house and castle the panic-stricken English settlers. On December 9th, Norreys wrote home a despatch about the state of the province. This despatch was sent to England by Spenser, as we learn from a subsequent despatch of Norreys of December 21.[3] It was received at Whitehall, as appears from Robert Cecil's endorsement, on the 24th of December. The passage from Ireland seems to have been a long one. And this is the last original document which remains about Spenser.

What happened to him in the rebellion we learn generally from two sources, from Camden's *History*, and from Drummond of Hawthornden's Recollections of Ben Jon-

[3] I am indebted for this reference to Mr. Hans Claude Hamilton. See also his Preface to Calendar of Irish Papers, 1574-85, p. lxxvi.

son's conversations with him in 1619. In the Munster insurrection of October, the new Earl of Desmond's followers did not forget that Kilcolman was an old possession of the Desmonds. It was sacked and burnt. Jonson related that a little new-born child of Spenser's perished in the flames. Spenser and his wife escaped, and he came over to England, a ruined and heart-broken man. He died Jan. 16, 159$\frac{8}{9}$; "he died," said Jonson, "for lack of bread in King Street [Westminster], and refused twenty pieces sent to him by my Lord of Essex, saying that he had no time to spend them." He was buried in the Abbey, near the grave of Chaucer, and his funeral was at the charge of the Earl of Essex. Beyond this we know nothing; nothing about the details of his escape, nothing of the fate of his manuscripts, or the condition in which he left his work, nothing about the suffering he went through in England, All conjecture is idle waste of time. We only know that the first of English poets perished miserably and prematurely, one of the many heavy sacrifices which the evil fortune of Ireland has cost to England; one of many illustrious victims to the madness, the evil customs, the vengeance of an ill-treated and ill-governed people.

One Irish rebellion brought him to Ireland, another drove him out of it. Desmond's brought him to pass his life there, and to fill his mind with the images of what was then Irish life, with its scenery, its antipathies, its tempers, its chances, and necessities. Tyrone's swept him from Ireland, beggared and hopeless. Ten years after his death, a bookseller, reprinting the six books of the *Faery Queen*, added two cantos and a fragment, *On Mutability*, supposed to be part of the *Legend of Constancy*. Where and how he got them he has not

told us. It is a strange and solemn meditation, on the universal subjection of all things to the inexorable conditions of change. It is strange, with its odd episode and fable which Spenser cannot resist about his neighbouring streams, its borrowings from Chaucer, and its quaint mixture of mythology with sacred and with Irish scenery, Olympus and Tabor, and his own rivers and mountains. But it is full of his power over thought and imagery; and it is quite in a different key from anything in the first six books. It has an undertone of awe-struck and pathetic sadness.

> What man that sees the ever whirling wheel
> Of Change, the which all mortal things doth sway,
> But that thereby doth find and plainly feel
> How Mutability in them doth play
> Her cruel sports to many men's decay.

He imagines a mighty Titaness, sister of Hecate and Bellona, most beautiful and most terrible, who challenges universal dominion over all things in earth and heaven, sun and moon, planets and stars, times and seasons, life and death; and finally over the wills and thoughts and natures of the gods, even of Jove himself; and who pleads her cause before the awful Mother of all things, figured as Chaucer had already imagined her:—

> Great Nature, ever young, yet full of eld;
> Still moving, yet unmoved from her stead;
> Unseen of any, yet of all beheld,
> Thus sitting on her throne.

He imagines all the powers of the upper and nether worlds assembled before her on his own familiar hills, instead of Olympus, where she shone like the Vision which "dazed" those "three sacred saints" on "Mount Thabor." Before her pass all things known of men, in rich and picturesque procession; the Seasons pass, and the Months, and the

Hours, and Day and Night, Life, as "a fair young lusty boy," Death, grim and grisly ;—

> Yet is he nought but parting of the breath,
> Ne ought to see, but like a shade to weene,
> Unbodied, unsoul'd, unheard, unseene—

and on all of them the claims of the Titaness, Mutability, are acknowledged. Nothing escapes her sway in this present state, except Nature which, while seeming to change, never really changes her ultimate constituent elements, or her universal laws. But when she seemed to have extorted the admission of her powers, Nature silences her. Change is apparent, and not real ; and the time is coming when all change shall end in the final changeless change.

> "I well consider all that ye have said,
> And find that all things stedfastnesse do hate
> And changed be ; yet, being rightly wayd,
> They are not changed from their first estate ;
> But by their change their being do dilate,
> And turning to themselves at length againe,
> Do worke their owne perfection so by fate :
> Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne,
> But they raigne over Change, and do their states maintaine.
>
> "Cease therefore, daughter, further to aspire,
> And thee content thus to be rul'd by mee,
> For thy decay thou seekst by thy desire ;
> But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
> And from thenceforth none no more change shal see."
> So was the Titanesse put downe and whist,
> And Jove confirm'd in his imperiall see.
> Then was that whole assembly quite dismist,
> And Natur's selfe did vanish, whither no man wist.

What he meant—how far he was thinking of those daring arguments of religious and philosophical change of which the world was beginning to be full, we cannot now tell.

The allegory was not finished: at least it is lost to us. We have but a fragment more, the last fragment of his poetry. It expresses the great commonplace which so impressed itself on the men of that time, and of which his works are full. No words could be more appropriate to be the last words of one who was so soon to be in his own person such an instance of their truth. They are fit closing words to mark his tragic and pathetic disappearance from the high and animated scene in which his imagination worked. And they record, too, the yearning hope of rest not extinguished by terrible and fatal disaster:—

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare
Of Mutabilitie, and well it way,
Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were
Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet, very sooth to say,
In all things else she beares the greatest sway:
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And love of things so vaine to cast away;
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
But stedfast rest of all things, firmely stayd
Upon the pillours of Eternity,
That is contrayr to Mutabilitie;
For all that moveth doth in Change delight:
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
With Him that is the God of Sabaoth hight:
O! that great Sabaoth God, grant me that Sabaoths sight.

THE END.

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English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

DRYDEN

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BY

G. SAINTSBURY

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1902

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PREFATORY NOTE.

A WRITER on Dryden is more especially bound to acknowledge his indebtedness to his predecessors, because, so far as matters of fact are concerned, that indebtedness must necessarily be greater than in most other cases. There is now little chance of fresh information being obtained about the poet, unless it be in a few letters hitherto undiscovered or withheld from publication. I have therefore to acknowledge my debt to Johnson, Malone, Scott, Mitford, Bell, Christie, the Rev. R. Hooper, and the writer of an article in the *Quarterly Review* for 1878. Murray's "Guide to Northamptonshire" has been of much use to me in the visits I have made to Dryden's birthplace, and the numerous other places associated with his memory in his native county. To Mr. J. Churton Collins I owe thanks for pointing out to me a Dryden house which, so far as he and I know, has escaped the notice of previous biographers. Mr. W. Noel Sainsbury, of the Record Office, has supplied me with some valuable information. My friend Mr. Edmund W. Gosse has not only read the proof-sheets of this book with the greatest care, suggesting many things of value, but has also kindly allowed me the use of original editions of many late seventeenth-century works, including

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county of Northampton. Erasmus, the son of this John Dryden—the name is spelt as usual at the time in half-a-dozen different ways, and there is no reason for supposing that the poet invented the *y*, though before him it seems to have been usually Driden—was created a baronet, and his third son, also an Erasmus, was the poet's father. Before this Erasmus married Mary Pickering the families had already been connected, but they lived on opposite sides of the county, Canons Ashby being in the hilly district which extends to the borders of Oxfordshire on the south-west, while Tichmarsh, the headquarters of the Pickerings, lies on the extreme east on high ground, overlooking the flats of Huntingdon. The poet's father is described as "of Tichmarsh," and seems to have usually resided in that neighbourhood. His property, however, which descended to our poet, lay in the neighbourhood of Canons Ashby at the village of Blakesley, which is not, as the biographers persistently repeat after one another, "near Tichmarsh," but some forty miles distant to the straightest flying crow. Indeed the connexion of the poet with the seat of his ancestors, and of his own property, appears to have been very slight. There is no positive evidence that he was ever at Canons Ashby at all, and this is a pity. For the house—still in the possession of his collateral descendants in the female line—is a very delightful one, looking like a miniature college quadrangle set down by the side of a country lane, with a background of park in which the deer wander, and a fringe of formal garden, full of the trimmest of yew-trees. All this was there in Dryden's youth, and, moreover, the place was the scene of some stirring events. Sir John Driden was a staunch parliamentarian, and his house lay obnoxious to the royalist garrisons of Towcester on the one side, and Ban-

bury on the other. On at least one occasion a great fight took place, the parliamentarians barricading themselves in the church of Canons Ashby, within stone's throw of the house, and defending it and its tower for several hours before the royalists forced the place and carried them off prisoners. This was in Dryden's thirteenth year, and a boy of thirteen would have rejoiced not a little in such a state of things.

But, as has been said, the actual associations of the poet lie elsewhere. They are all collected in the valley of the Nene, and a well-girt man can survey the whole in a day's walk. It is remarkable that Dryden's name is connected with fewer places than is the case with almost any other English poet, except, perhaps, Cowper. If we leave out of sight a few visits to his father-in-law's seat at Charlton, in Wiltshire, and elsewhere, London and twenty miles of the Nene valley exhaust the list of his residences. This valley is not an inappropriate *locale* for the poet who in his faults, as well as his merits, was perhaps the most English of all English writers. It is not grand, or epic, or tragical, but on the other hand it is sufficiently varied, free from the monotony of the adjacent fens, and full of historical and architectural memories. The river in which Dryden acquired, beyond doubt, that love of fishing which is his only trait in the sporting way known to us, is always present in long slow reaches, thick with water plants. The remnants of the great woods which once made Northamptonshire the rival of Nottingham and Hampshire are close at hand, and luckily the ironstone workings which have recently added to the wealth, and detracted from the beauty of the central district of the county, have not yet invaded Dryden's region. Tichmarsh and Aldwinkle, the places

of his birth and education, lie on opposite sides of the river, about two miles from Thrapston. Aldwinkle is sheltered and low, and looks across to the rising ground on the summit of which Tichmarsh church rises, flanked hard by with a huge cedar-tree on the rectory lawn, a cedar-tree certainly coeval with Dryden, since it was planted two years before his birth. A little beyond Aldwinkle, following the course of the river, is the small church of Pilton, where Erasmus Dryden and Mary Pickering were married on October 21, 1630. All these villages are embowered in trees of all kinds, elms and walnuts especially, and the river banks slope in places with a pleasant abruptness, giving good views of the magnificent woods of Lilford, which, however, are new comers comparatively speaking. Another mile or two beyond Pilton brings the walker to Oundle, which has some traditional claim to the credit of teaching Dryden his earliest humanities, and the same distance beyond Oundle is Cotterstock, where a house, still standing, but altered, was the poet's favourite sojourn in his later years. Long stretches of meadows lead thence across the river into Huntingdonshire, and there, just short of the great north road, lies the village of Chesterton, the residence, in the late days of the seventeenth century, of Dryden's favourite cousins, and frequently his own. All these places are intimately connected with his memory, and the last named is not more than twenty miles from the first. Between Cotterstock and Chesterton, where lay the two houses of his kinsfolk which we know him to have most frequented, lies, as it lay then, the grim and shapeless mound studded with ancient thorn-trees, and looking down upon the silent Nene, which is all that remains of the castle of Fotheringhay. Now, as then, the great lantern

of the church, with its flying buttresses and tormented tracery, looks out over the valley. There is no allusion that I know of to Fotheringhay in Dryden's works, and, indeed, there seems to have been a very natural feeling among all seventeenth century writers on the court side that the less said about Mary Stuart the better. Fotheringhay waits until Mr. Swinburne shall complete the trilogy begun in *Chastelard* and continued in *Bothwell*, for an English dramatic poet to tread worthily in the steps of Montchrestien, of Vondel, and of Schiller. But Dryden must have passed it constantly, when he was at Cotterstock he must have had it almost under his eyes, and we know that he was always brooding over fit historical subjects in English history for the higher poetry. Nor is it, I think, an unpardonable conceit to note the dominance in the haunts of this intellectually greatest among the partisans of the Stuarts, of the scene of the greatest tragedy, save one, that befell even that house of the furies.

There is exceedingly little information obtainable about Dryden's youth. The inscription in Tichmarsh Church, the work of his cousin Mrs. Creed, an excellent person whose needle and pencil decorated half the churches and half the manor-houses in that part of the country, boasts that he had his early education in that village, while Oundle, as has been said, has some traditional claims to a similar distinction. From the date of his birth to his entry at Westminster School we have no positive information whatever about him, and even the precise date of the latter is unknown. He was a king's scholar, and it seems that the redoubtable Busby took pains with him—doubtless in the well-known Busbeian manner—and liked his verse translations. From Westminster he went to Cambridge, where he was entered at Trinity on May 18th,

1650, matriculated on July 16th, and on October 2nd was elected to a Westminster scholarship. He was then nineteen, an instance, be it observed, among many, of the complete mistake of supposing that very early entrance into the universities was the rule before our own days. Of Dryden's Cambridge sojourn we know little more than of his sojourn at Westminster. He was in trouble on July 19th, 1652, when he was discommonsed and gated for a fortnight for disobedience and contumacy. Shadwell also says that while at Cambridge he "scurrilously traduced a nobleman" and was "rebuked on the head" therefor. But Shadwell's unsupported assertions about Dryden are unworthy of the slightest credence. He took his degree in 1654, and though he gained no fellowship, seems to have resided for nearly seven years at the university. There has been a good deal of controversy about the feelings with which Dryden regarded his *alma mater*. It is certainly curious that, except a formal acknowledgment of having received his education from Trinity, there is to be found in his works no kind of affectionate reference to Cambridge, while there is to be found an extremely unkind reference to her in his very best manner. In one of his numerous prologues to the University of Oxford—the University of Cambridge seems to have given him no occasion of writing a prologue—occur the famous lines—

> Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
> Than his own mother university;
> Thebes did his green unknowing youth engage,
> He chooses Athens in his riper age.

It has been sought to diminish the force of this very left-handed compliment to Cambridge by quoting a phrase of Dryden's concerning the "gross flattery that universities

will endure." But I am inclined to think that most university men will agree with me that this is probably a unique instance of a member of the one university going out of his way to flatter the other at the expense of his own. Dryden was one of the most accomplished flatterers that ever lived, and certainly had no need save of deliberate choice to resort to the vulgar expedient of insulting one person or body by way of praising another. What his cause of dissatisfaction was it is impossible to say, but the trivial occurrence already mentioned certainly will not account for it.

If, however, during these years we have little testimony about Dryden, we have three documents from his own hand, which are of no little interest. Although Dryden was one of the most late-writing of English poets, he had got into print before he left Westminster. A promising pupil of that school, Lord Hastings, had died of small-pox, and according to the fashion of the time a *tombeau*, as it would have been called in France, was published, containing elegies by a very large number of authors, ranging from Westminster boys to the already famous names of Waller and Denham. Somewhat later an epistle commendatory was contributed by Dryden to a volume of religious verse by his friend John Hoddesdon. Later still, and probably after he had taken his degree, he wrote a letter to his cousin, Honor Driden, daughter of the reigning baronet of Canons Ashby, which the young lady had the grace to keep. All these juvenile productions have been very severely judged. As to the poems, the latest writer on the subject, a writer in the *Quarterly Review*, whom I certainly do not name otherwise than *honoris causâ*, pronounces the one execrable, and the other inferior to the juvenile productions of that miserable poetaster, Kirke

White. It seems to this reviewer that Dryden had at this time "no ear for verse, no command of poetic diction, no sense of poetic taste." As to the letter, even Scott describes it as "alternately coarse and pedantic." I am in hopeless discord with these authorities, both of whom I respect. Certainly neither the elegy on Lord Hastings, nor the complimentary poem to Hoddesdon, nor the letter to Honor Driden, is a masterpiece. But all three show, as it seems to me, a considerable literary faculty, a remarkable feeling after poetic style, and above all the peculiar virtue which was to be Dryden's own. They are all saturated with conceits, and the conceit was the reigning delicacy of the time. Now if there is one thing more characteristic and more honourably characteristic of Dryden than another, it is that he was emphatically of his time. No one ever adopted more thoroughly and more unconsciously the motto as to *Spartam nactus es*. He tried every fashion, and where the fashion was capable of being brought *sub specie æternitatis* he never failed so to bring it. Where it was not so capable he never failed to abandon it and to substitute something better. A man of this temperament (which it may be observed is a mingling of the critical and the poetical temperaments) is not likely to find his way early or to find it at all without a good many preliminary wanderings. But the two poems so severely condemned, though they are certainly not good poems, are beyond all doubt possessed of the elements of goodness. I doubt myself whether any one can fairly judge them who has not passed through a novitiate of careful study of the minor poets of his own day. By doing this one acquires a certain faculty of distinguishing, as Théophile Gautier once put it in his own case, "the sheep of Hugo from the goats of Scribe." I do not hesitate to say that

an intelligent reviewer in the year 1650 would have ranked Dryden, though perhaps with some misgivings, among the sheep. The faults are simply an exaggeration of the prevailing style, the merits are different.

As for the epistle to Honor Driden, Scott must surely have been thinking of the evil counsellors who wished him to bowdlerise glorious John, when he called it "coarse." There is nothing in it but the outspoken gallantry of an age which was not afraid of speaking out, and the prose style is already of no inconsiderable merit. It should be observed, however, that a most unsubstantial romance has been built up on this letter, and that Miss Honor's father, Sir John Driden, has had all sorts of anathemas launched at him, in the Locksley Hall style, for damming the course of true love. There is no evidence whatever to prove this crime against Sir John. It is in the nature of mankind almost invariably to fall in love with its cousins, and—fortunately according to some physiologists—by no means invariably to marry them. That Dryden seriously aspired to his cousin's hand there is no proof, and none that her father refused to sanction the marriage. On the contrary, his foes accuse him of being a dreadful flirt, and of making "the young blushing virgins die" for him in a miscellaneous but probably harmless manner. All that is positively known on the subject is that Honor never married, that the cousins were on excellent terms some half-century after this fervent epistle, and that Miss Driden is said to have treasured the letter and shown it with pride, which is much more reconcilable with the idea of a harmless flirtation than of a great passion tragically cut short.

At the time of the writing of this epistle Dryden was indeed not exactly an eligible suitor. His father had just

died—1654—and had left him two-thirds of the Blakesley estates, with a reversion to the other third at the death of his mother. The land extended to a couple of hundred acres or thereabouts, and the rent, which with characteristic generosity Dryden never increased, though rents went up in his time enormously, amounted to 60*l.* a year. Dryden's two-thirds were estimated by Malone at the end of the last century to be worth about 120*l.* income of that day, and this certainly equals at least 200*l.* to-day. With this to fall back upon, and with the influence of the Driden and Pickering families, any bachelor in those days might be considered provided with prospects, but exacting parents might consider the total inadequate to the support of a wife and family. Sir John Driden is said, though a fanatical Puritan, to have been a man of no very strong intellect, and he certainly did not feather his nest in the way which was open to any defender of the liberties of the people. Sir Gilbert Pickering, who in consequence of the intermarriages before alluded to was doubly Dryden's cousin, was wiser in his generation. He was one of the few members of the Long Parliament who judiciously attached themselves to the fortunes of Cromwell, and was plentifully rewarded with fines, booty, places, and honours, by the Protector. When Dryden finally left Cambridge in 1657 he is said to have attached himself to this kinsman. And at the end of the next year he wrote his remarkable Heroic Stanzas on Cromwell's death. This poem must have at once put out of doubt his literary merits. There was assuredly no English poet then living, except Milton and Cowley, who could possibly have written it, and it was sufficiently different from the style of either of those masters. Taking the four-line stanza, which Davenant had made popular, the poet starts with a

bold opening, in which the stately march of the verse is not to be disguised by all the frippery of erudition which loads it :—

> And now 'tis time ; for their officious haste,
> Who would before have borne him to the sky,
> Like eager Romans, ere all rites were past,
> Did let too soon the sacred eagle fly.

The whole poem contains but thirty-seven of these stanzas, but it is full of admirable lines and thoughts. No doubt there are plenty of conceits as well, and Dryden would not have been Dryden if there had not been. But at the same time the singular justness which always marked his praise, as well as his blame, is as remarkable in the matter of the poem, as the force and vigour of the diction and versification are in its manner. To this day no better eulogy of the Protector has been written, and the poet with a remarkable dexterity evades, without directly denying, the more awkward points in his hero's career and character. One thing which must strike all careful readers of the poem is the entire absence of any attack on the royalist party. To attempt, as Shadwell and other libellers attempted a quarter of a century later, to construe a famous couplet—

> He fought to end our fighting, and essayed
> To staunch the blood by breathing of the vein—

into an approval of the execution of Charles I., is to wrest the sense of the original hopelessly and unpardonably. Cromwell's conduct is contrasted with that of those who "the quarrel loved, but did the cause abhor," who "first sought to inflame the parties, then to poise," &c., i.e. with Essex, Manchester, and their likes ; and it need hardly be

said that this contrast was ended years before there was any question of the king's death. Indeed, to a careful reader nowadays the Heroic Stanzas read much more like an elaborate attempt to hedge between the parties than like an attempt to gain favour from the roundheads by uncompromising advocacy of their cause. The author is one of those "sticklers of the war" that he himself describes.

It is possible that a certain half-heartedness may have been observed in Dryden by those of his cousin's party. It is possible, too, that Sir Gilbert Pickering, like Thackeray's Mr. Scully, was a good deal more bent on making use of his young kinsman than on rewarding him in any permanent manner. At any rate, no kind of preferment fell to his lot, and the anarchy of the "foolish Ishbosheth" soon made any such preferment extremely improbable. Before long it would appear that Dryden had definitely given up whatever position he held in Sir Gilbert Pickering's household, and had betaken himself to literature. The fact of his so betaking himself almost implied adherence to the royalist party. In the later years of the commonwealth, English letters had rallied to a certain extent from the disarray into which they were thrown by the civil war, but the centres of the rally belonged almost exclusively to the royalist party. Milton had long forsworn pure literature, to devote himself to official duties with an occasional personal polemic as a relief. Marvell and Wither, the two other chief lights of the Puritan party, could hardly be regarded by any one as men of light and leading, despite the really charming lyrics which both of them had produced. All the other great literary names of the time were, without exception, on the side of the exile. Hobbes was a royalist, though a somewhat singular one, Cowley

was a royalist, Herrick was a royalist, so was Denham, so was, as far as he was anything, the unstable Waller. Moreover, the most practically active author of the day, the one man of letters who combined the power of organizing literary effort with the power of himself producing literary work of merit, was one of the staunchest of the king's friends. Sir William Davenant, without any political concession, had somehow obtained leave from the republican government to reintroduce theatrical entertainments of a kind, and moderate royalists, like Evelyn, with an interest in literature and the arts and sciences, were returning to their homes and looking out for the good time coming. That Dryden, under these circumstances, having at the time a much more vivid interest in literature than in politics, and belonging as he did rather to the Presbyterian faction, who were everywhere returning to the royalist political faith, than to the Independent republicans, should become royalist in principle was nothing surprising. Those who reproach him with the change (if change it was) forget that he shared it with the immense majority of the nation. For the last half-century the literary current has been so entirely on the Puritan side that we are probably in danger of doing at least as much injustice to the royalists as was at one time done to their opponents. One thing in particular I have never seen fairly put as accounting for the complete royalization of nearly the whole people, and it is a thing which has a special bearing on Dryden. It has been said that his temperament was specially and exceptionally English. Now one of the most respectable, if not the most purely rational features of the English character, is its objection to wanton bloodshed for political causes, without form of law. It was this beyond all question that alienated

the English from James the Second, it was this that in the heyday of Hanoverian power made them turn a cold shoulder on the Duke of Cumberland, it was this which enlisted them almost as one man against the French revolutionists, it was this which brought about in our own days a political movement to which there is no need to refer more particularly. Now it must be remembered that either as the losing party, or for other reasons, the royalists were in the great civil war almost free from the charge of reckless bloodshedding. Their troops were disorderly and given to plunder, but not to cruelty. No legend even charges against Astley or Goring, against Rupert or Lunsford, anything like the Drogheda massacre —the effect of which on the general mind Defoe, an unexceptionable witness, has preserved by a chance phrase in *Robinson Crusoe*—or the hideous bloodbath of the Irish-women after Naseby, or the brutal butchery of Dr. Hudson at Woodcroft in Dryden's own county, where the soldiers chopped off the priest's fingers as he clung to the gurgoyles of the tower, and thrust him back with pikes into the moat which, mutilated as he was, he had managed to swim. A certain humanity and absence of bloodthirstiness are among Dryden's most creditable characteristics,[1] and these excesses of fanaticism are not at all unlikely to have had their share in determining him to adopt the winning

[1] The too famous Political Prologues may, perhaps, be quoted against me here. I have only to remark: first, that, bad as they are, they form an infinitesimal portion of Dryden's work, and are in glaring contrast with the sentiments pervading that work as a whole; secondly, that they were written at a time of political excitement unparalleled in history, save once at Athens and once or twice at Paris. But I cannot help adding that their denouncers usually seem to me to be at least partially animated by the notion that Dryden wished the wrong people to be hanged.

side when at last it won. But it is perhaps more to the purpose that his literary leanings must of themselves have inevitably inclined him in the same direction. There was absolutely no opening for literature on the republican side, a fact of which no better proof can be afforded than the small salary at which the first man of letters then living was hired by a government which, whatever faults it had, certainly did not sin by rewarding its other servants too meagrely. That Dryden at this time had any deep-set theological or political prejudices is very improbable. He certainly had not, like Butler, noted for years the faults and weaknesses of the dominant party, so as to enshrine them in immortal ridicule when the time should come. But he was evidently an ardent devotee of literature; he was not averse to the pleasures of the town, which if not so actively interfered with by the Commonwealth as is sometimes thought, were certainly not encouraged by it; and his friends and associates must have been royalists almost to a man. So he threw himself at once on that side when the chance came, and had probably thrown himself there in spirit some time before. The state of the literature in which he thus took service must be described before we go any further.

The most convenient division of literature is into poetry, drama, and prose. With regard to poetry, the reigning style at the advent of Dryden was, as everybody knows, the peculiar style unfortunately baptized as "metaphysical." The more catholic criticism of the last 100 years has disembarrassed this poetry of much of the odium which once hung round it, without, however, doing full justice to its merits. In Donne, especially, the king of the school, the conceits and laboured fancies which distinguish it frequently reach a hardly surpassed height of poetical

beauty. When Donne speculates as to the finding on the body of his dead lover

> A bracelet of bright hair about the bone

when he tells us how--

> I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
> Who died before the god of love was born;

the effect is that of summer lightning on a dark night suddenly exposing unsuspected realms of fantastic and poetical suggestion. But at its worst the school was certainly bad enough, and its badnesses had already been exhibited by Dryden with considerable felicity in his poem on Lord Hastings and the small-pox. I really do not know that in all Johnson's carefully picked specimens in his Life of Cowley, a happier absurdity is to be found than

> Each little pimple had a tear in it,
> To wail the fault its rising did commit.

Of such a school as this, though it lent itself more directly than is generally thought to the unequalled oddities of Butler, little good in the way of serious poetry could come. On the other hand, the great romantic school was practically over, and Milton, its last survivor, was, as has been said, in a state of poetical eclipse. There was therefore growing up a kind of school of good sense in poetry, of which Waller, Denham, Cowley, and Davenant were the chiefs. Waller derives most of his fame from his lyrics, inferior as these are to those of Herrick and Carew. Cowley was a metaphysician with a strong hankering after something different. Denham, having achieved one admirable piece of versification, had devoted himself chiefly to

doggrel; but Davenant, though perhaps not so good a poet as any of the three, was a more living influence. His early works, especially his dirge on Shakespeare and his exquisite lines to the Queen, are of the best stamp of the older school. His *Gondibert*, little as it is now read, and unsuccessful as the quatrain in which it is written must always be for a very long work, is better than any long narrative poem, for many a year before and after. Both his poetical and his dramatic activity (of which more anon) were incessant, and were almost always exerted in the direction of innovation. But the real importance of these four writers was the help they gave to the development of the heroic couplet, the predestined common form of poetry of the more important kind for a century and a half to come. The heroic couplet was, of course, no novelty in English; but it had hitherto been only fitfully patronized for poems of length, and had not been adapted for general use. The whole structure of the decasyllabic line before the middle of the seventeenth century, was ill calculated for the perfecting of the couplet. Accustomed either to the stately plainness of blank verse, or to the elaborate intricacies of the stanza, writers had got into the habit of communicating to their verse a slow and somewhat languid movement. The satiric poems in which the couplet had been most used were, either by accident or design, couched in the roughest possible verse, so rough that in the hands of Marston and Donne it almost ceased to be capable of scansion. In general, the couplet had two drawbacks. Either it was turned by means of *enjambements* into something very like rhythmic prose, with rhymes straying about at apparently indefinite intervals, or it was broken up into a *staccato* motion by the neglect to support and carry on the rhythm at the termination of the distichs. All the

four poets mentioned, especially the three first, did much to fit the couplet for miscellaneous work. All of them together, it is hardly needful to say, did not do so much as the young Cambridge man who, while doing bookseller's work for Herringman the publisher, hanging about the coffee-houses, and planning plays with Davenant and Sir Robert Howard, was waiting for opportunity and impulse to help him to make his way.

The drama was in an even more critical state than poetry pure and simple, and here Davenant was the important person. All the giant race except Shirley were dead, and Shirley had substituted a kind of *tragédie bourgeoise* for the work of his masters. Other practitioners chiefly favoured the example of one of the least imitable of those masters, and out-forded Ford in horrors of all kinds, while the comedians clung still more tightly to the humour-comedy of Jonson. Davenant himself had made abundant experiments—experiments, let it be added, sometimes of no small merit—in both these styles. But the occupations of tragedy and comedy were gone, and the question was how to find a new one for them. Davenant succeeded in procuring permission from the Protector, who like most Englishmen of the time was fond of music, to give what would now be called entertainments; and the entertainments soon developed into something like regular stage plays. But Shakespeare's godson, with his keen manager's appreciation of the taste of the public, and his travelled experience, did not content himself with deviating cautiously into the old paths. He it was who, in the *Siege of Rhodes*, introduced at once into England the opera, and a less long-lived but, in a literary point of view, more important variety, the heroic play, the latter of which always retained some tinge of the former. There

are not many subjects on which, to put it plainly, more rubbish has been talked than the origin of the heroic play. Very few Englishmen have ever cared to examine accurately the connexion between this singular growth and the classical tragedy already flourishing in France; still fewer have ever cared to investigate the origins of that classical tragedy itself. The blundering attribution of Dryden and his rivals to Corneille and Racine, the more blundering attribution of Corneille and Racine to the Scudéry romance (as if somebody should father Shelley on Monk Lewis) has been generally accepted without much hesitation, though Dryden himself has pointed out that there is but little connexion between the French and the English drama; and though the history of the French drama itself is perfectly intelligible, and by no means difficult to trace. The French classical drama is the direct descendant of the drama of Seneca, first imitated by Jodelle and Garnier in the days of the *Pléiade*; nor did it ever quit that model, though in the first thirty years of the seventeenth century something was borrowed from Spanish sources. The English heroic drama, on the other hand, which Davenant invented, which Sir Robert Howard and Lord Orrery made fashionable, and for which Dryden achieved a popularity of nearly twenty years, was one of the most cosmopolitan—I had almost said the most mongrel—of literary productions. It adopted the English freedom of action, multiplicity of character, and licence of stirring scenes acted *coram populo*. It borrowed lyrical admixture from Italy, exaggerated and bombastic language came to it from Spain, and to France it owed little more than its rhymed dialogue, and perhaps something of its sighs and flames. The disadvantages of rhyme in dramatic writing seem to modern Englishmen

so great, that they sometimes find it difficult to understand how any rational being could exchange the blank verse of Shakespeare for the rhymes of Dryden, much more for the rhymes of his contemporaries and predecessors. But this omits the important consideration that it was not the blank verse of Shakespeare or of Fletcher that was thus exchanged. In the three-quarters of a century, or thereabouts, which elapsed between the beginning of the great dramatic era and the Restoration, the chief vehicle of the drama had degenerated full as much as the drama itself; and the blank verse of the plays subsequent to Ford is of anything but Shakespearian quality—is indeed in many cases such as is hardly to be recognized for verse at all. Between this awkward and inharmonious stuff and the comparatively polished and elegant couplets of the innovators there could be little comparison, especially when Dryden had taken up the couplet himself.

Lastly, in prose the time was pretty obviously calling for a reform. There were great masters of English prose living when Dryden joined the literary world of London, but there was no generally accepted style for the journey-work of literature. Milton and Taylor could arrange the most elaborate symphonies; Hobbes could write with a crabbed clearness as lucid almost as the flowing sweetness of Berkeley; but these were exceptions. The endless sentences out of which Clarendon is wont just to save himself, when his readers are wondering whether breath and brain will last out their involution; the hopeless coils of parenthesis and afterthought in which Cromwell's speech lay involved, till Mr. Carlyle was sent on a special mission to disentangle them, show the dangers and difficulties of the ordinary prose style of the day. It was terribly cumbered about quotations, which it introduced with

merciless frequency. It had no notion of a unit of style in the sentence. It indulged, without the slightest hesitation, in every *détour* and involution of second thoughts and by-the-way qualifications. So far as any models were observed, those models were chiefly taken from the inflected languages of Greece and Rome, where the structural alterations of the words according to their grammatical connexion are for the most part sufficient to make the meaning tolerably clear. Nothing so much as the lack of inflexions saved our prose at this time from sharing the fate of German, and involving itself almost beyond the reach of extrication. The common people, when not bent upon fine language, could speak and write clearly and straighforwardly, as Bunyan's works show to this day to all who care to read. But scholars and divines deserved much less well of their mother tongue. It may indeed be said that prose was infinitely worse off than poetry. In the latter there had been an excellent style, if not one perfectly suited for all ends, and it had degenerated. In the former, nothing like a general prose style had ever yet been elaborated at all; what had been done had been done chiefly in the big-bow-wow manner, as Dryden's editor might have called it. For light miscellaneous work, neither fantastic nor solemn, the demand was only just being created. Cowley indeed wrote well, and, comparatively speaking, elegantly, but his prose work was small in extent and little read in comparison to his verse. Tillotson was Dryden's own contemporary, and hardly preceded him in the task of reform.

From this short notice it will be obvious that the general view, according to which a considerable change took place and was called for at the Restoration, is correct, notwithstanding the attempts recently made to prove the

contrary by a learned writer. Professor Masson's lists of men of letters and of the dates of their publication of their works prove, if he will pardon my saying so, nothing. The actual spirit of the time is to be judged not from the production of works of writers who, as they one by one dropped off, left no successors, but from those who struck root downwards and blossomed upwards in the general literary soil. Milton is not a writer of the Restoration, though his greatest works appeared after it, and though he survived it nearly fifteen years. Nor was Taylor, nor Clarendon, nor Cowley: hardly even Davenant, or Waller, or Butler, or Denham. The writers of the Restoration are those whose works had the seeds of life in them; who divined or formed the popular tastes of the period, who satisfied that taste, and who trained up successors to prosecute and modify their own work. The interval between the prose and the poetry of Dryden and the prose and the poetry of Milton is that of an entire generation, notwithstanding the manner in which, chronologically speaking, they overlap. The objects which the reformer, consciously or unconsciously, set before him have been sufficiently indicated. It must be the task of the following chapters to show how and to what extent he effected a reform; what the nature of that reform was; what was the value of the work which in effecting it he contributed to the literature of his country.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY LITERARY WORK.

THE foregoing chapter will have already shown the chief difficulty of writing a life of Dryden—the almost entire absence of materials. At the Restoration the poet was nearly thirty years old, and of positive information as to his life during these thirty years we have half a dozen dates, the isolated fact of his mishap at Trinity, a single letter and three poems, not amounting in all to three hundred lines. Nor can it be said that even subsequently, during his forty years of fame and literary activity, positive information as to his life is plentiful. His works are still the best life of him, and in so far as a biography of Dryden is filled with any matter not purely literary, it must for the most part be filled with controversy as to his political and religious opinions and conduct rather than with accounts of his actual life and conversation. Omitting for the present literary work, the next fact that we have to record after the Restoration is one of some importance, though as before the positive information obtainable in connexion with it is but scanty. On the 1st of December, 1663, Dryden was married at St. Swithin's Church to Lady Elizabeth Howard, eldest daughter of the Earl of Berkshire.

This marriage, like most of the scanty events of Dryden's

life, has been made the occasion of much and unnecessary controversy. The libellers of the Popish Plot disturbances twenty years later declared that the character of the bride was doubtful, and that her brothers had acted towards Dryden in somewhat the same way as the Hamiltons did towards Grammont. A letter of hers to the Earl of Chesterfield, which was published about half a century ago, has been used to support the first charge, besides abundant arguments as to the unlikelihood of an earl's daughter marrying a poor poet for love. It is one of the misfortunes of prominent men that when fact is silent about their lives fiction is always busy. If we brush away the cobwebs of speculation, there is nothing in the least suspicious about this matter. Lord Berkshire had a large family and a small property. Dryden himself was, as we have seen, well born and well connected. That some of his sisters had married tradesmen seems to Scott likely to have been shocking to the Howards; but he must surely have forgotten the famous story of the Earl of Bedford's objection to be raised a step in the peerage because it would make it awkward for the younger scions of the house of Russell to go into trade. The notion of an absolute severance between Court and City at that time, is one of the many unhistorical fictions which have somehow or other obtained currency. Dryden was already an intimate friend of Sir Robert Howard, if not also of the other brother, Edward, and perhaps it is not unnoteworthy that Lady Elizabeth was five-and-twenty, an age in those days somewhat mature, and one at which a young lady would be thought wise by her family in accepting any creditable offer. As to the Chesterfield letter, the evidence it contains can only satisfy minds previously made up. It testifies certainly to something like a flirtation, and suggests an interview, but there

is nothing in it at all compromising. The libels already mentioned are perfectly vague and wholly untrustworthy.

It seems, though on no very definite evidence, that the marriage was not altogether a happy one. Dryden appears to have acquired some small property in Wiltshire; perhaps also a royal grant which was made to Lady Elizabeth in recognition of her father's services; and Lord Berkshire's Wiltshire house of Charlton became a country retreat for the poet. But his wife was, it is said, ill-tempered and not overburdened with brains, and he himself was probably no more a model of conjugal propriety than most of his associates. I say probably, for here, too, it is astonishing how the evidence breaks down when it is examined, or rather how it vanishes altogether into air. Mr. J. R. Green has roundly informed the world that "Dryden's life was that of a libertine, and his marriage with a woman who was yet more dissolute than himself only gave a new spur to his debaucheries." We have seen what foundation there is for this gross charge against Lady Elizabeth; now let us see what ground there is for the charge against Dryden. There are the libels of Shadwell and the rest of the crew, to which not even Mr. Christie, a very severe judge of Dryden's moral character, assigns the slightest weight; there is the immorality ascribed to Bayes in the *Rehearsal*, a very pretty piece of evidence indeed, seeing that Bayes is a confused medley of half a dozen persons; there is a general association by tradition of Dryden's name with that of Mrs. Reeve, a beautiful actress of the day; and finally there is a tremendous piece of scandal which is the battle-horse of the devil's advocates. A curious letter appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1745, the author of which is unknown, though conjectures, as to which there are difficulties, identify him with

Dryden's youthful friend Southerne. "I remember," says this person, "plain John Dryden, before he paid his court with success to the great, in one uniform clothing of Norwich drugget. I have ate tarts with him and Madam Reeve at the Mulberry Garden, when our author advanced to a sword and a Chedreux wig." Perhaps there is no more curious instance of the infinitesimal foundation on which scandal builds than this matter of Dryden's immorality. Putting aside mere vague libellous declamation, the one piece of positive information on the subject that we have is anonymous, was made at least seventy years after date, and avers that John Dryden, a dramatic author, once ate tarts with an actress and a third person. This translated into the language of Mr. Green becomes the dissoluteness of a libertine, spurred up to new debaucheries.

It is immediately after the marriage that we have almost our first introduction to Dryden as a live man seen by live human beings. And the circumstances of this introduction are characteristic enough. On the 3rd of February, 1664, Pepys tells us that he stopped, as he was going to fetch his wife, at the great coffee-house in Covent Garden, and there he found "Dryden, the poet I knew at Cambridge," and all the wits of the town. The company pleased Pepys, and he made a note to the effect, that "it will be good coming thither." But the most interesting thing is this glimpse, first, of the associates of Dryden at the university; secondly, of his installation at Will's, the famous house of call, where he was later to reign as undisputed monarch; and thirdly, of the fact that he was already recognized as "Dryden the poet." The remainder of the present chapter will best be occupied by pointing out what he had done, and in brief space afterwards, did that title, reserving the important subject of

his dramatic activity, which also began about this time, for separate treatment.

The lines on the death of Lord Hastings, and the lines to Hoddesdon, have, it has been said, a certain promise about them to experienced eyes, but it is of that kind of promise which, as the same experience teaches, is at least as often followed by little performance as by much. The lines on Cromwell deserve less faint praise. The following stanzas exhibit at once the masculine strength and originality which were to be the poet's great sources of power, and the habit of conceited and pedantic allusion which he had caught from the fashions of the time:—

Swift and resistless through the land he passed,
Like that bold Greek who did the East subdue,
And made to battle such heroic haste
As if on wings of victory he flew.

He fought secure of fortune as of fame,
Till by new maps the island might be shown
Of conquests, which he strewed where'er he came,
Thick as the galaxy with stars is sown.

His palms, though under weights they did not stand,
Still thrived; no winter did his laurels fade.
Heaven in his portrait showed a workman's hand,
And drew it perfect, yet without a shade.

Peace was the prize of all his toil and care,
Which war had banished, and did now restore:
Bologna's walls so mounted in the air
To seat themselves more surely than before.

An impartial contemporary critic, if he could have anticipated the methods of a later school of criticism, might have had some difficulty in deciding whether the masterly

plainness, directness, and vigour of the best lines here ought or ought not to excuse the conceit about the palms and the weights, and the fearfully far-fetched piece of fancy history about Bologna. Such a critic, if he had had the better part of discretion, would have decided in the affirmative. There were not three poets then living who could have written the best lines of the Heroic Stanzas, and what is more, those lines were not in the particular manner of either of the poets who, as far as general poetical merit goes, might have written them. But the Restoration, which for reasons given already I must hold to have been genuinely welcome to Dryden, and not a mere occasion of profitable coat-turning, brought forth some much less ambiguous utterances. *Astræa Redux* (1660), a panegyric on the coronation (1661), a poem to Lord Clarendon (1662), a few still shorter pieces of the complimentary kind to Dr. Charleton (1663), to the Duchess of York (1665), and to Lady Castlemaine (166–?), lead up to *Annus Mirabilis* at the beginning of 1667, the crowning effort of Dryden's first poetical period, and his last before the long absorption in purely dramatic occupations which lasted till the Popish Plot and its controversies evoked from him the expression of hitherto unsuspected powers.

These various pieces do not amount in all to more than two thousand lines, of which nearly two-thirds belong to *Annus Mirabilis*. But they were fully sufficient to show that a new poetical power had arisen in the land, and their qualities, good and bad, might have justified the anticipation that the writer would do better and better work as he grew older. All the pieces enumerated, with the exception of *Annus Mirabilis*, are in the heroic couplet, and their versification is of such a kind that the relapse into the quatrain in the longer poem is not a little surprising.

But nothing is more characteristic of Dryden than the extremely tentative character of his work, and he had doubtless not yet satisfied himself that the couplet was suitable for narrative poems of any length, notwithstanding the mastery over it which he must have known himself to have attained in his short pieces. The very first lines of *Astræa Redux* show this mastery clearly enough.

> Now with a general peace the world was blest,
> While ours, a world divided from the rest,
> A dreadful quiet felt, and worser far
> Than arms, a sullen interval of war.

Here is already the energy divine for which the author was to be famed, and, in the last line at least, an instance of the varied cadence and subtly-disposed music which were, in his hands, to free the couplet from all charges of monotony and tameness. But almost immediately there is a falling off. The poet goes off into an unnecessary simile preceded by the hackneyed and clumsy "thus," a simile quite out of place at the opening of a poem, and disfigured by the too famous, "an horrid stillness first invades the ear," which if it has been extravagantly blamed —and it seems to me that it has—certainly will go near to be thought a conceit. But we have not long to wait for another chord that announces Dryden:—

> For his long absence Church and State did groan,
> Madness the pulpit, faction seized the throne.
> Experienced age in deep despair was lost
> To see the rebel thrive, the loyal crost.
> Youth, that with joys had unacquainted been,
> Envied grey hairs that once good days had seen.
> We thought our sires, not with their own content,
> Had, ere we came to age, our portion spent.

Whether the matter of this is suitable for poetry or not is

one of those questions on which doctors will doubtless disagree to the end of the chapter. But even when we look back through the long rows of practitioners of the couplet who have succeeded Dryden, we shall, I think, hardly find one who is capable of such masterly treatment of the form, of giving to the phrase a turn at once so clear and so individual, of weighting the verse with such dignity, and at the same time winging it with such lightly flying speed. The poem is injured by numerous passages introduced by the usual "as" and "thus" and "like," which were intended for ornaments, and which in fact simply disfigure. It is here and there charged, after the manner of the day, with inappropriate and clumsy learning, and with doubtful Latinisms of expression. But it is redeemed by such lines as—

> When to be God's anointed was his crime ;

as the characteristic gibe at the Covenant insinuated by the description of the Guisean League—

> As holy and as Catholic as ours ;

as the hit at the

> Polluted nest
> Whence legion twice before was dispossest ;

as the splendid couplet on the British Amphitrite—

> Proud her returning prince to entertain
> With the submitted fasces of the main.

Such lines as these must have had for the readers of 1660 the attraction of a novelty which only very careful students of the literature of the time can understand now. The merits of *Astræa Redux* must of course not be judged by the reader's acquiescence in its sentiments. But let

any one read the following passage without thinking of the treaty of Dover and the closed exchequer, of Madam Carwell's twelve thousand a year, and Lord Russell's scaffold, and he assuredly will not fail to recognise their beauty:—

> Methinks I see those crowds on Dover's strand,
> Who in their haste to welcome you to land
> Choked up the beach with their still-growing store,
> And made a wilder torrent on the shore:
> While, spurred with eager thoughts of past delight,
> Those who had seen you court a second sight,
> Preventing still your steps, and making haste
> To meet you often wheresoe'er you past.
> How shall I speak of that triumphant day
> When you renewed the expiring pomp of May?
> A month that owns an interest in your name;
> You and the flowers are its peculiar claim.
> That star, that at your birth shone out so bright
> It stained the duller sun's meridian light,
> Did once again its potent fires renew,
> Guiding our eyes to find and worship you.

The extraordinary art with which the recurrences of the *you* and *your*—in the circumstances naturally recited with a little stress of the voice—are varied in position so as to give a corresponding variety to the cadence of the verse, is perhaps the chief thing to be noted here. But a comparison with even the best couplet verse of the time will show many other excellences in it. I am aware that this style of minute criticism has gone out of fashion, and that the variations of the position of a pronoun have terribly little to do with "criticism of life;" but as I am dealing with a great English author whose main distinction is to have reformed the whole formal part of English prose and English poetry, I must, once for all, take leave to follow the only road open to me to show what he actually did.

The other smaller couplet-poems which have been

mentioned are less important than *Astræa Redux*, not merely in point of size, but because they are later in date The piece on the coronation, however, contains lines and passages equal to any in the longer poem, and it shows very happily the modified form of conceit which Dryden, throughout his life, was fond of employing, and which, employed with his judgment and taste, fairly escapes the charges usually brought against "Clevelandisms," while it helps to give to the heroic the colour and picturesqueness which after the days of Pope it too often lacked. Such is the fancy about the postponement of the ceremony—

> Had greater haste these sacred rites prepared
> Some guilty months had in our triumph shared.
> But this untainted year is all your own,
> Your glories may without our crimes be shown.

And such an exceedingly fine passage in the poem to Clarendon which is one of the most finished pieces of Dryden's early versification—

> Our setting sun from his declining seat
> Shot beams of kindness on you, not of heat:
> And, when his love was bounded in a few
> That were unhappy that they might be true,
> Made you the favourite of his last sad times,
> That is, a sufferer in his subjects' crimes:
> Thus those first favours you received were sent,
> Like Heaven's rewards, in earthly punishment.
> Yet Fortune, conscious of your destiny,
> Even then took care to lay you softly by,
> And wrapt your fate among her precious things,
> Kept fresh to be unfolded with your King's.
> Shown all at once, you dazzled so our eyes
> As new-born Pallas did the god's surprise;
> When springing forth from Jove's new-closing wound,
> She struck the warlike spear into the ground;
> Which sprouting leaves did suddenly enclose
> And peaceful olives shaded as they rose.

For once the mania for simile and classical allusion has not led the author astray here, but has furnished him with a very happy and legitimate ornament. The only fault in the piece is the use of "did," which Dryden never wholly discarded, and which is perhaps occasionally allowable enough.

The remaining poems require no very special remark, though all contain evidence of the same novel and unmatched mastery over the couplet and its cadence. The author, however, was giving himself more and more to the dramatic studies which will form the subject of the next chapter, and to the prose criticisms which almost from the first he associated with those studies. But the events of the year 1666 tempted him once more to indulge in non-dramatic work, and the poem of *Annus Mirabilis* was the result. It seems to have been written, in part at least, at Lord Berkshire's seat of Charlton, close to Malmesbury, and was prefaced by a letter to Sir Robert Howard. Dryden appears to have lived at Charlton during the greater part of 1665 and 1666, the plague and fire years. He had been driven from London, not merely by dread of the pestilence, but by the fact that his ordinary occupation was gone owing to the closing of the play-houses, and he evidently occupied himself at Charlton with a good deal of literary work, including his essay on dramatic poetry, his play of the *Maiden Queen*, and *Annus Mirabilis* itself. This last was published very early in 1667, and seems to have been successful. Pepys bought it on the 2nd of February, and was fortunately able to like it better than he did *Hudibras*. "A very good poem," the Clerk of the Acts of the Navy writes it down. It may be mentioned in passing that during this same stay at Charlton Dryden's eldest son Charles was born.

Annus Mirabilis consists of 304 quatrains on the *Gondibert* model, reasons for the adoption of which Dryden gives (not so forcibly perhaps as is usual with him) in the before-mentioned letter to his brother-in-law. He speaks of rhyme generally with less respect than he was soon to show, and declares that he has adopted the quatrain because he judges it "more noble and full of dignity" than any other form he knows. The truth seems to be that he was still to a great extent under the influence of Davenant, and that *Gondibert* as yet retained sufficient prestige to make its stanza act as a not unfavourable advertisement of poems written in it. With regard to the nobility and dignity of this stanza, it may safely be said that *Annus Mirabilis* itself, the best poem ever written therein, killed it by exposing its faults. It is indeed, at least when the rhymes of the stanzas are unconnected, a very bad metre for the purpose. For it is chargeable with more than the disjointedness of the couplet, without the possibility of relief, while on the other hand the quatrains have not, like the Spenserian stave or the *ottava rima*, sufficient bulk to form units in themselves, and to include within them varieties of harmony. Despite these drawbacks, however, Dryden produced a very fine poem in *Annus Mirabilis*, though I am not certain that even its best passages equal those cited from the couplet pieces. At any rate in this poem the characteristics of the master in what may be called his poetical adolescence are displayed to the fullest extent. The weight and variety of his line, his abundance of illustration and fancy, his happy turns of separate phrase, and his singular faculty of bending to poetical uses the most refractory names and things, all make themselves fully felt here. On the other hand there is still an undue tendency to conceit and exuberance of simile. The famous lines—

These fight like husbands, but like lovers those;
These fain would keep, and those more fain enjoy;

re followed in the next stanza by a most indubitably metaphysical" statement that

Some preciously by shattered porcelain fall
And some by aromatic splinters die.

'his cannot be considered the happiest possible means of nforming us that the Dutch fleet was laden with spices nd *magots*. Such puerile fancies are certainly unworthy f a poet who could tell how

The mighty ghosts of our great Harrys rose
And armèd Edwards looked with anxious eyes;

nd who, in the beautiful simile of the eagle, has equalled he Elizabethans at their own weapons. I cannot think, owever, admirable as the poem is in its best passages the description of the fire for instance), that it is echnically the equal of *Astræa Redux*. The monotonous ecurrence of the same identical cadence in each stanza— recurrence which even Dryden's art was unable to pre- ent, and which can only be prevented by some such nterlacements of rhymes and *enjambements* of sense as ose which Mr. Swinburne has successfully adopted in *aus Veneris*—injures the best passages The best of all undoubtedly the following:—

In this deep quiet, from what source unknown,
Those seeds of fire their fatal birth disclose;
And first few scattering sparks about were blown,
Big with the flames that to our ruin rose.

Then in some close-pent room it crept along
And, smouldering as it went, in silence fed;
Till the infant monster, with devouring strong,
Walked boldly upright with exalted head.

Now, like some rich and mighty murderer,
Too great for prison which he breaks with gold,
Who fresher for new mischiefs does appear
And dares the world to tax him with the old,

So 'scapes the insulting fire his narrow jail
And makes small outlets into open air;
There the fierce winds his tender force assail
And beat him downward to his first repair.

The winds, like crafty courtesans, withheld
His flames from burning but to blow them more:
And, every fresh attempt, he is repelled
With faint denials, weaker than before.

And now, no longer letted of his prey
He leaps up at it with enraged desire,
O'erlooks the neighbours with a wide survey
And nods at every house his threatening fire.

The ghosts of traitors from the Bridge descend,
With bold fanatic spectres to rejoice;
About the fire into a dance they bend
And sing their sabbath notes with feeble voice.

The last stanza indeed contains a fine image finely expressed, but I cannot but be glad that Dryden tried no more experiments with the recalcitrant quatrain.

Annus Mirabilis closes the series of early poems, and for fourteen years from the date of its publication Dryden was known, with insignificant exceptions, as a dramatic writer only. But his efforts in poetry proper, though they had not as yet resulted in any masterpiece, had, as I have endeavoured to point out, amply entitled him to the position of a great and original master of the formal part of poetry, if not of a poet who had distinctly found his way. He had carried out a conception of the couplet which was almost entirely new, having been anticipated

only by some isolated and ill-sustained efforts. He had manifested an equal originality in the turn of his phrase, an extraordinary command of poetic imagery, and, above all, a faculty of handling by no means promising subjects in an indisputably poetical manner. Circumstances which I shall now proceed to describe called him away from the practice of pure poetry, leaving to him, however, a reputation amply deserved and acknowledged even by his enemies, of possessing unmatched skill in versification. Nor were the studies upon which he now entered wholly alien to his proper function, though they were in some sort a bye-work. They strengthened his command over the language, increased his skill in verse, and above all tended by degrees to reduce and purify what was corrupt in his phraseology and system of ornamentation. Fourteen years of dramatic practice did more than turn out some admirable scenes and some even more admirable criticism. They acted as a filtering reservoir for his poetical powers, so that the stream which, when it ran into them, was the turbid and rubbish-laden current of *Annus Mirabilis* flowed out as impetuous, as strong, but clear and without base admixture, in the splendid verse of *Absalom and Achitophel.*

CHAPTER III.

PERIOD OF DRAMATIC ACTIVITY.

THERE are not many portions of English literature which have been treated with greater severity by critics than the Restoration drama, and of the Restoration dramatists few have met with less favour, in proportion to their general literary eminence, than Dryden. Of his comedies in particular few have been found to say a good word. His sturdiest champion, Scott, dismisses them as "heavy;" Hazlitt, a defender of the Restoration comedy in general, finds little in them but "ribaldry and extravagance;" and I have lately seen them spoken of with a shudder as "horrible." The tragedies have fared better, but not much better; and thus the remarkable spectacle is presented of a general condemnation, varied only by the faintest praise, of the work to which an admitted master of English devoted, almost exclusively, twenty years of the flower of his manhood. So complete is the oblivion into which these dramas have fallen, that it has buried in its folds the always charming and sometimes exquisite songs which they contain. Except in Congreve's two editions, and in the bulky edition of Scott, Dryden's theatre is unattainable, and thus the majority of readers have but little opportunity of correcting from individual study the unfavourable impressions derived from the

verdicts of the critics. For myself, I am very far from considering Dryden's dramatic work as on a level with his purely poetical work. But as nearly always happens, and as happened, by a curious coincidence, in the case of his editor, the fact that he did something else much better has obscured the fact that he did this thing in not a few instances very well. Scott's poems as poems are far inferior to his novels as novels; Dryden's plays are far inferior as plays to his satires and his fables as poems. But both the poems of Scott and the plays of Dryden are a great deal better than the average critic admits.

That dramatic work went somewhat against the grain with Dryden, is frequently asserted on his own authority, and is perhaps true. He began it, however, tolerably early, and had finished at least the scheme of a play (on a subject which he afterwards resumed) shortly after the Restoration. As soon as that event happened, a double incentive to play-writing began to work upon him. It was much the most fashionable of literary occupations, and also much the most lucrative. Dryden was certainly not indifferent to fame, and, though he was by no means a covetous man, he seems to have possessed at all times the perfect readiness to spend whatever could be honestly got which frequently distinguishes men of letters. He set to work accordingly, and produced in 1663 the *Wild Gallant*. We do not possess this play in the form in which it was first acted and damned. Afterwards Lady Castlemaine gave it her protection; the author added certain attractions according to the taste of the time, and it was both acted and published. It certainly cannot be said to be a great success even as it is. Dryden had, like most of his fellows, attempted the Comedy of Humours,

as it was called at the time, and as it continued to be, and to be called, till the more polished comedy of manners, or artificial comedy, succeeded it, owing to the success of Wycherley, and still more of Congreve. The number of comedies of this kind written after 1620 is very large, while the fantastic and poetical comedy of which Shakespeare and Fletcher had almost alone the secret had almost entirely died out. The merit of the Comedy of Humours is the observation of actual life which it requires in order to be done well, and the consequent fidelity with which it holds up the muses' looking-glass (to use the title of one of Randolph's plays) to nature. Its defects are its proneness to descend into farce, and the temptation which it gives to the writer to aim rather at mere fragmentary and sketchy delineations than at finished composition. At the Restoration this school of drama was vigorously enough represented by Davenant himself, by Sir Aston Cokain, and by Wilson, a writer of great merit who rather unaccountably abandoned the stage very soon, while in a year or two Shadwell, the actor Lacy and several others were to take it up and carry it on. It had frequently been combined with the embroiled and complicated plots of the Spanish comedy of intrigue, the adapters usually allowing these plots to conduct themselves much more irregularly than was the case in the originals, while the deficiencies were made up, or supposed to be made up, by a liberal allowance of "humours." The danger of this sort of work was perhaps never better illustrated than by Shadwell, when he boasted in one of his prefaces that "four of the humours were entirely new," and appeared to consider this a sufficient claim to respectful reception. Dryden in his first play fell to the fullest extent into the blunder of this combined Spanish-

English style, though on no subsequent occasion did he repeat the mistake. By degrees the example and influence of Molière sent complicated plots and "humours" alike out of fashion, though the national taste and temperament were too strongly in favour of the latter to allow them to be totally banished. In our very best plays of the so-called artificial style, such as *Love for Love*, and the masterpieces of Sheridan, character sketches to which Ben Jonson himself would certainly not refuse the title of humours appear, and contribute a large portion of the interest. Dryden, however, was not likely to anticipate this better time, or even to distinguish himself in the older form of the humour-comedy. He had little aptitude for the odd and quaint, nor had he any faculty of devising or picking up strokes of extravagance, such as those which his enemy Shadwell could command, though he could make no very good use of them. The humours of Trice and Bibber and Lord Nonsuch in the *Wild Gallant* are forced and too often feeble, though there are flashes here and there, especially in the part of Sir Timorous, a weakling of the tribe of Aguecheek; but in this first attempt, the one situation and the one pair of characters which Dryden was to treat with tolerable success are already faintly sketched. In Constance and Loveby, the pair of light-hearted lovers who carry on a flirtation without too much modesty certainly, and with a remarkable absence of refinement, but at the same time with some genuine affection for one another and in a hearty, natural manner, make their first appearance. It is to be noted in Dryden's favour that these lovers of his are for the most part free from the charge of brutal heartlessness and cruelty, which has been justly brought against those of Etherege, of Wycherley, and, at least in the case of the *Old Bachelor*,

of Congreve. The men are rakes, and rather vulgar rakes, but they are nothing worse. The women have too many of the characteristics of Charles the Second's maids of honour; but they have, at the same time, a certain healthiness and sweetness of the older days, which bring them, if not close to Rosalind and Beatrice, at any rate pretty near to Fletcher's heroines, such as Dorothea and Mary. Still the *Wild Gallant* can by no possibility be called a good play. It was followed, at no long interval, by the *Rival Ladies*, a tragicomedy, which is chiefly remarkable for containing some heroic scenes in rhyme, for imitating closely the tangled and improbable plot of its Spanish original, for being tolerably decent, and I fear it must be added, for being intolerably dull. The third venture was in every way more important. The *Indian Emperor* (1665) was Dryden's first original play, his first heroic play, and indirectly formed part of a curious literary dispute, one of many in which he was engaged, but which in this case proved fertile in critical studies of his best brand. Sir Robert Howard, Dryden's brother-in-law, had with the assistance of Dryden himself, produced a play called the *Indian Queen*, and to this the *Indian Emperor* was nominally a sequel. But as Dryden remarks, with a quaintness which may or may not be satirical, the conclusion of the *Indian Queen* "left but little matter to build upon, there remaining but two of the considerable characters alive." The good Sir Robert had indeed heaped the stage with dead in his last act in a manner which must have confirmed any French critic who saw or read the play in his belief of the bloodthirstiness of the English drama. The field was thus completely clear, and Dryden, retaining only Montezuma as his hero, used his own fancy and invention without restraint in constructing

the plot and arranging the characters. The play was extremely popular, and it divides with *Tyrannic Love* and the *Conquest of Granada* the merit of being the best of all English heroic plays. The origin of that singular growth has been already given, and there is no need to repeat the story, while the *Conquest of Granada* is so much more the model play of the style, that anything like an analysis of a heroic play had better be reserved for this. The *Indian Emperor* was followed, in 1667, by the *Maiden Queen*, a tragicomedy. The tragic or heroic part is very inferior to its predecessor, but the comic part has merits which are by no means inconsiderable. Celadon and Florimel are the first finished specimens of that pair of practitioners of light o' love flirtation which was Dryden's sole contribution of any value to the comic stage. Charles gave the play particular commendation, and called it "his play," as Dryden takes care to tell us. Still in the same year came *Sir Martin Mar-all*, Dryden's second pure comedy. But it is in no sense an original play, and Dryden was not even the original adapter. The Duke of Newcastle, famous equally for his own gallantry in the civil war and for the oddities of his second duchess, Margaret Lucas, translated *l'Etourdi*, and gave it to Dryden, who perhaps combined with it some things taken from other French plays, added not a little of his own, and had it acted. It was for those days exceedingly successful, running more than thirty nights at its first appearance. It is very coarse in parts, but amusing enough. The English blunderer is a much more contemptible person than his French original. He is punished instead of being rewarded, and there is a great deal of broad farce brought in. Dryden was about this time frequently engaged in this doubtful sort of col-

laboration, and the very next play which he produced, also a result of it, has done his reputation more harm than any other. This was the disgusting burlesque of the *Tempest*, which, happily, there is much reason for thinking belongs almost wholly to Davenant. Besides degrading in every way the poetical merit of the poem, Sir William, from whom better things might have been expected, got into his head what Dryden amiably calls the "excellent contrivance" of giving Miranda a sister, and inventing a boy (Hippolito) who has never seen a woman. The excellent contrivance gives rise to a good deal of extremely characteristic wit. But here, too, there is little reason for giving Dryden credit or discredit for anything more than a certain amount of arrangement and revision. His next appearance, in 1668, with the *Mock Astrologer* was a more independent one. He was indeed, as was very usual with him, indebted to others for the main points of his play, which comes partly from Thomas Corneille's *Feint Astrologue*, partly from the *Dépit Amoureux*. But the play, with the usual reservations, may be better spoken of than any of Dryden's comedies, except *Marriage à la Mode* and *Amphitryon*. Wildblood and Jacintha, who play the parts of Celadon and Florimel in the *Maiden Queen*, are a very lively pair. Much of the dialogue is smart, and the incidents are stirring, while the play contains no less than four of the admirable songs which Dryden now began to lavish on his audiences. In the same year, or perhaps in 1669, appeared the play of *Tyrannic Love*, or the *Royal Martyr*, a compound of exquisite beauties and absurdities of the most frantic description. The part of St. Catherine (very inappropriately allotted to Mrs. Eleanor Gwyn) is beautiful throughout, and that of Maximin is quite captivating in

its outrageousness. The Astral spirits who appear gave occasion for some terrible parody in the *Rehearsal*, but their verses are in themselves rather attractive. An account of the final scene of the play will perhaps show better than anything else the rant and folly in which authors indulged, and which audiences applauded in these plays. The Emperor Maximin is dissatisfied with the conduct of the upper powers in reference to his domestic peace; he thus expresses his dissatisfaction:—

> What had the gods to do with me or mine?
> Did I molest your heaven?
> Why should you then make Maximin your foe,
> Who paid you tribute, which he need not do?
> Your altars I with smoke of rams did crown
> For which you leaned your hungry nostrils down,
> All daily gaping for my incense there,
> More than your sun could draw you in a year.
> And you for this these plagues have on me sent.
> But, by the gods (by Maximin I meant),
> Henceforth I and my world
> Hostility with you and yours declare.
> Look to it, gods! for you the aggressors are,
> Keep you your rain and sunshine in your skies,
> And I'll keep back my flame and sacrifice.
> Your trade of heaven shall soon be at a stand
> And all your goods lie dead upon your hand.

Thereupon an aggrieved and possibly shocked follower, of the name of Placidius, stabs him, but the Emperor wrests the dagger from him and returns the blow. Then follows this stage direction: "Placidius falls and the Emperor staggers after him and sits down upon him." From this singular throne his guards offer to assist him. But he declines help, and having risen once sits down again upon Placidius, who, despite the stab and the weight of the Emperor, is able to address an irreproachable decasyllabic

couplet to the audience. Thereupon Maximin again stabs the person upon whom he is sitting, and they both expire as follows:—

Plac. Oh! I am gone. *Max.* And after thee I go,
Revenging still and following ev'n to the other world my blow
And shoving back this earth on which I sit
I'll mount and scatter all the gods I hit.
[*Stabs him again.*]

Tyrannic Love was followed by the two parts of *Almanzor and Almahide*, or the *Conquest of Granada*, the triumph and at the same time the *reductio ad absurdum* of the style. I cannot do better than give a full argument of this famous production, which nobody now reads, and which is full of lines that everybody habitually quotes.

The kingdom of Granada under its last monarch, Boabdelin, is divided by the quarrels of factions, or rather families—the Abencerrages and the Zegrys. At a festival held in the capital this dissension breaks out. A stranger interferes on what appears to be the weaker side, and kills a prominent leader of the opposite party, altogether disregarding the king's injunctions to desist. He is seized by the guards and ordered for execution, but is then discovered to be Almanzor, a valiant person lately arrived from Africa, who has rendered valuable assistance to the Moors in their combat with the Spaniards. The king thereupon apologizes, and Almanzor addresses much outrageous language to the factions. This is successful, and harmony is apparently restored. Then there enters the Duke of Arcos, a Spanish envoy, who propounds hard conditions; but Almanzor remarks that "the Moors have Heaven and me," and the duke retires. Almahide, the king's betrothed, sends a messenger to invite him to a

dance; but Almanzor insists upon a sally first, and the first act ends with the acceptance of this order of amusement. The second opens with the triumphant return of the Moors, the ever-victorious Almanzor having captured the Duke of Arcos. Then is introduced the first female character of importance, Lyndaraxa, sister of Zulema, the Zegry chief, and representative throughout the drama of the less amiable qualities of womankind. Abdalla, the king's brother, makes love to her, and she very plainly tells him that if he were king she might have something to say to him. Zulema's factiousness strongly seconds his sister's ambition and her jealousy of Almahide, and the act ends by the formation of a conspiracy against Boabdelin, the conspirators resolving to attach the invincible Almanzor to their side. The third act borrows its opening from the incident of Hotspur's wrath, Almanzor being provoked with Boabdelin for the same cause as Harry Percy with Henry IV. Thus he is disposed to join Abdalla, while Abdelmelech, the chief of the Abencerrages, is introduced in a scene full of "sighs and flames," as the prince's rival for the hand of Lyndaraxa. The promised dance takes place with one of Dryden's delightful, and, alas, scarcely ever wholly quotable lyrics. The first two stanzas may however be given:—

Beneath a myrtle's shade,
Which love for none but happy lovers made,
I slept, and straight my love before me brought
Phyllis, the object of my waking thought.
Undressed she came my flame to meet,
While love strewed flowers beneath her feet,
Flowers which, so pressed by her, became more sweet.

From the bright vision's head
A careless veil of lawn was loosely shed,
From her white temples fell her shaded hair,
Like cloudy sunshine, not too brown nor fair.

Her hands, her lips, did love inspire,
Her every grace my heart did fire,
But most her eyes, which languished with desire.

It is a thousand pities that the quotation cannot be continued; but it cannot, though the verse is more artfully beautiful even than here.

While, however, the king and his court are listening and looking, mischief is brewing. Almanzor, Abdalla, and the Zegrys are in arms. The king is driven in; Almahide is captured. Then a scene takes place between Almanzor and Almahide in the full spirit of the style. Almanzor sues for Almahide as a prisoner that he may set her at liberty; but a rival appears in the powerful Zulema. Almanzor is disobliged by Abdalla, and at once makes his way to the citadel, whither Boabdelin has fled, and offers him his services. At the beginning of the fourth act they are of course accepted with joy, and equally of course effectual. Almanzor renews his suit, but Almahide refers him to her father. The fifth act is still fuller of extravagances. Lyndaraxa holds a fort which has been committed to her against both parties, and they discourse with her from without the walls. The unlucky Almanzor prefers his suit to the king and to Almahide's father; has recourse to violence on being refused, and is overpowered —for a wonder—and bound. His life is however spared, and after a parting scene with Almahide he withdraws from the city.

The second part opens in the Spanish camp but soon shifts to Granada, where the unhappy Boabdelin has to face the mutinies provoked by the expulsion of Almanzor. The king has to stoop to entreat Almahide, now his queen, to use her influence with her lover to come back. An act of fine confused fighting follows, in which Lynda-

raxa's castle is stormed, the stormers in their turn driven out by the Duke of Arcos and Abdalla, who has joined the Spaniards, and a general *imbroglio* created. But Almanzor obeys Almahide's summons with the result of more sighs and flames. The conduct of Almahide is unexceptionable, but Boabdelin's jealousy is inevitably aroused, and this in its turn mortally offends the queen, which again offends Almanzor. More inexplicable embroilment follows, and Lyndaraxa tries her charms vainly on the champion. The war once more centres round the Albayzin, Lyndaraxa's sometime fortress, and it is not flippant to say that every one fights with every one else; after which the hero sees the ghost of his mother, and addresses it *more suo*. Yet another love-scene follows, and then Zulema, who has not forgotten his passion for Almahide, brings a false accusation against her, the assumed partner of her guilt being however not Almanzor but Abdelmelech. This leaves the hero free to undertake the wager of battle for his mistress, though he is distracted with jealous fear that Zulema's tale is true. The result of the ordeal is a foregone conclusion; but Almahide, though her innocence is proved, is too angry with her husband for doubting her to forgive him, and solemnly forswears his society. She and Almanzor meet once more, and by this time even the conventionalities of the heroic play allow him to kiss her hand. The king is on the watch and breaks in with fresh accusations; but the Spaniards at the gates cut short the discussion and (at last) the embroilment and suffering of true love. The catastrophe is arrived at in the most approved manner. Boabdelin dies fighting; Lyndaraxa, who has given traitorous help with her Zegrys, is proclaimed queen by Ferdinand but almost immediately stabbed by Abdelmelech. Almanzor turns out to be the

long-lost son of the Duke of Arcos; and Almahide, encouraged by Queen Isabella, owns that when her year of widowhood is up she may possibly be induced to crown his flames.

Such is the barest outline of this famous play, and I fear that as it is it is too long, though much has been omitted, including the whole of a pleasing underplot of love between two very creditable lovers, Osmyn and Benzayda. Its preposterous "revolutions and discoveries," the wild bombast of Almanzor and others, the apparently purposeless embroilment of the action in ever-new turns and twists are absurd enough. But there is a kind of generous and noble spirit animating it which could not fail to catch an audience blinded by fashion to its absurdities. There is a skilful sequence even in the most preposterous events, which must have kept up the interest unfalteringly; and all over the dialogue are squandered and lavished flowers of splendid verse. Many of its separate lines are, as has been said, constantly quoted without the least idea on the quoter's part of their origin, and many more are quotable. Everybody, for instance, knows the vigorous couplet:—

> Forgiveness to the injured does belong,
> But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong;

but everybody does not know the preceding couplet, which is perhaps better still:—

> A blush remains in a forgiven face,
> It wears the silent tokens of disgrace.

Almanzor's tribute to Lyndaraxa's beauty, at the same time that he rejects her advances, is in little, perhaps, as good an instance as could be given of the merits of the

poetry and of the stamp of its spirit, and with this I must be content :—

> Fair though you are
> As summer mornings, and your eyes more bright
> Than stars that twinkle on a winter's night;
> Though you have eloquence to warm and move
> Cold age and fasting hermits into love;
> Though Almahide with scorn rewards my care
> Yet than to change 'tis nobler to despair.
> My love's my soul and that from fate is free,
> 'Tis that unchanged and deathless part of me.

The audience that cheered this was not wholly vile.

The *Conquest of Granada* appeared in 1670, and in the following year the famous *Rehearsal* was brought out at the King's Theatre. The importance of this event in Dryden's life is considerable, but it has been somewhat exaggerated. In the first place, the satire, keen as much of it is, is only half directed against himself. The original Bayes was beyond all doubt Davenant, to whom some of the jokes directly apply, while they have no reference to Dryden. In the second place, the examples of heroic plays selected for parody and ridicule are by no means exclusively drawn from Dryden's theatre. His brothers-in-law, Edward and Robert Howard, and others figure beside him, and the central character is, on the whole, as composite as might be expected from the number of authors whose plays are satirized. Although fathered by Buckingham it seems likely that not much of the play is actually his. His coadjutors are said to have been Butler, Sprat, and Martin Clifford, Master of the Charterhouse, author of some singularly ill-tempered if not very pointed remarks on Dryden's plays, which were not published till long afterwards. Butler's hand is indeed traceable in many of

the parodies of heroic diction, none of which are so good as his acknowledged "Dialogue of Cat and Puss." The wit and, for the most part, the justice of the satire are indisputable, and, if it be true, as I am told, that the *Rehearsal* does not now make a good acting play, the fact does not bear favourable testimony to the culture and receptive powers of modern audiences. But there were many reasons why Dryden should take the satire very coolly, as in fact he did. As he says, with his customary proud humility, "his betters were much more concerned than himself;" and it seems highly probable that Buckingham's coadjutors, confiding in his good nature or his inability to detect the liberty, had actually introduced not a few traits of his own into this singularly composite portrait. In the second place, the farce was what would be now called an advertisement, and a very good one. Nothing can be a greater mistake than to say or to think that the *Rehearsal* killed heroic plays. It did nothing of the kind, Dryden himself going on writing them for some years until his own fancy made him cease, and others continuing still longer. There is a play of Crowne's, *Caligula*, in which many of the scenes are rhymed, dating as late as 1698, and the general character of the heroic play, if not the rhymed form, continued almost unaltered. Certainly Dryden's equanimity was very little disturbed. Buckingham he paid off in kind long afterwards, and his Grace immediately proceeded by his answer to show how little he can have had to do with the *Rehearsal*. To Sprat and Clifford no allusions that I know of are to be found in his writings. As for Butler, an honourable mention in a letter to Lawrence Hyde shows how little acrimony he felt towards him. Indeed, it may be said of Dryden that he was at no time touchy about personal attacks. It was only when,

as Shadwell subsequently did, the assailants became outrageous in their abuse and outstepped the bounds of fair literary warfare, or when, as in Blackmore's case, there was some singular ineptitude in the fashion of the attack, that he condescended to reply.

It is all the more surprising that he should, at no great distance of time, have engaged gratuitously in a contest which brought him no honour, and in which his allies were quite unworthy of him. Elkanah Settle was one of Rochester's innumerable led-poets, and was too utterly beneath contempt to deserve even Rochester's spite. The character of Doeg, ten years later, did Settle complete justice. He had a "blundering kind of melody" about him, but absolutely nothing else. However, a heroic play of his, the *Empress of Morocco*, had considerable vogue for some incomprehensible reason. Dryden allowed himself to be drawn by Crowne and Shadwell into writing with them a pamphlet of criticisms on the piece. Settle replied by a study, as we should say nowadays, of the very vulnerable *Conquest of Granada*. This is the only instance in which Dryden went out of his way to attack any one; and even in this instance Settle had given some cause by an allusion of a contemptuous kind in his preface. But as a rule the laureate showed himself proof against much more venomous criticisms than any that Elkanah was capable of. It is perhaps not uncharitable to suspect that the preface of the *Empress of Morocco* bore to some extent the blame of the *Rehearsal*, which it must be remembered was for years amplified and re-edited with parodies of fresh plays of Dryden's as they appeared. If this were the case it would not be the only instance of such a transference of irritation, and it would explain Dryden's otherwise inexplicable conduct. His attack on Settle is, from a strictly literary

point of view, one of his most unjustifiable acts. The pamphlet, it is true, is said to have been mainly "Starch Johnny" Crowne's, and the character of its strictures is quite different from Dryden's broad and catholic manner of censuring. But the adage, "tell me with whom you live," is peculiarly applicable in such a case, and Dryden must be held reponsible for the assault, whether its venom be really due to himself, to Crowne, or to the foul-mouthed libeller of whose virulence the laureate himself was in years to come to have but too familiar experience.

A very different play in 1672 gave Dryden almost as much credit in comedy as the *Conquest of Granada* in tragedy. There is indeed a tragic or serious underplot (and a very ridiculous one too) in *Marriage à la Mode*. But its main interest, and certainly its main value, is comic. It is Dryden's only original excursion into the realms of the higher comedy. For his favourite pair of lovers he here substitutes a quartette. Rhodophil and Doralice are a fashionable married pair, who, without having actually exhausted their mutual affection, are of opinion that their character is quite gone if they continue faithful to each other any longer. Rhodophil accordingly lays siege to Melantha, a young lady who is intended, though he does not know this, to marry his friend Palamede, while Palamede, deeply distressed at the idea of matrimony, devotes himself to Doralice. The cross purposes of this quartette are admirably related, and we are given to understand that no harm comes of it all. But in Doralice and Melantha, Dryden has given studies of womankind quite out of his usual line. Melantha is, of course, far below Millamant, but it is not certain that that delightful creation of Congreve's genius does not owe something to

her. Doralice, on the other hand, has ideas as to the philosophy of flirtation which do her no little credit. It is a thousand pities that the play is written in the language of the time, which makes it impossible to revive and difficult to read without disgust.

Nothing of this kind can or need be said about the play which followed, the *Assignation*. It is vulgar, coarse, and dull; it was damned, and deserved it; while its successor *Amboyna*, is also deserving of the same epithets, though being a mere play of ephemeral interest, and serving its turn, it was not damned. The old story of the Amboyna massacre—a bad enough story certainly—was simply revived in order to excite the popular wrath against the Dutch.

The dramatic production which immediately succeeded these is one of the most curious of Dryden's performances. A disinclination to put himself to the trouble of designing a wholly original composition is among the most noteworthy of his literary characteristics. No man followed or copied in a more original manner, but it always seems to have been a relief to him to have something to follow or to copy. Two at least of his very best productions—*All for Love* and *Palamon and Arcite*—are specially remarkable in this respect. We can hardly say that the *State of Innocence* ranks with either of these; yet it has considerable merits—merits of which very few of those who repeat the story about "tagging Milton's verses" are aware. As for that story itself, it is not particularly creditable to the good manners of the elder poet. "Ay! young man, you may tag my verses if you will," is the traditional reply which Milton is said to have made to Dryden's request for permission to write the opera. The question of Dryden's relationship to Milton and his early

opinion of *Paradise Lost* is rather a question for a Life of Milton than for the present pages: it is sufficient to say that, with his unfailing recognition of good work, Dryden undoubtedly appreciated Milton to the full long before Addison, as it is vulgarly held, taught the British public to admire him. As for the *State of Innocence* itself, the conception of such an opera has sometimes been derided as preposterous—a derision which seems to overlook the fact that Milton was himself, in some degree, indebted to an Italian dramatic original. The piece is not wholly in rhyme, but contains some very fine passages.

The time was approaching, however, when Dryden was to quit his "long-loved mistress Rhyme," as far as dramatic writing was concerned. These words occur in the prologue to *Aurengzebe*, which appeared in 1675. It would appear, indeed, that at this time Dryden was thinking of deserting not merely rhymed plays but play-writing altogether. The dedication to Mulgrave contains one of several allusions to his well-known plan of writing a great heroic poem. Sir George Mackenzie had recently put him upon the plan of reading through most of the earlier English poets, and he had done so attentively, with the result of aspiring to the epic itself. But he still continued to write dramas, though *Aurengzebe* was his last in rhyme, at least wholly in rhyme. It is in some respects a very noble play, free from the rants, the preposterous bustle, and the still more preposterous length of the *Conquest of Granada*, while possessing most of the merits of that singular work in an eminent degree. Even Dryden hardly ever went further in cunning of verse than in some of the passages of *Aurengzebe*, such as that well-known one which seems to take up an echo of *Macbeth*:—

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat.
Yet, fooled with hope, men favour the deceit,
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay.
To-morrow's falser than the former day,
Lies worse, and while it says, we shall be blest
With some new joys, cuts off what we possest.
Strange cozenage! none would live past years again
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain,
And from the dregs of life think to receive
What the first sprightly running could not give.
I'm tired with waiting for this chemic gold
Which fools us young and beggars us when old.

There is a good deal of moralizing of this melancholy kind in the play, the characters of which are drawn with a serious completeness not previously attempted by the author. It is perhaps the only one of Dryden's which, with very little alteration, might be acted, at least as a curiosity, at the present day. It is remarkable that the structure of the verse in the play itself would have led to the conclusion that Dryden was about to abandon rhyme. There is in *Aurengzebe* a great tendency towards *enjambement;* and as soon as this tendency gets the upper hand, a recurrence to blank verse is, in English dramatic writing, tolerably certain. For the intonation of English is not, like the intonation of French, such that rhyme is an absolute necessity to distinguish verse from prose; and where this necessity does not exist, rhyme must always appear to an intelligent critic a more or less impertinent intrusion in dramatic poetry. Indeed the main thing which had for a time converted Dryden and others to the use of the couplet in drama was a curious notion that blank verse was too easy for long and dignified compositions. It was thought by others that the secret of it had been lost, and that the choice was practically between

bad blank verse and good rhyme. In *All for Love* Dryden very shortly showed, *ambulando*, that this notion was wholly groundless. From this time forward he was faithful to the model he had now adopted and—which was of the greatest importance—he induced others to be faithful too. Had it not been for this, it is almost certain that *Venice Preserved* would have been in rhyme, that is to say that it would have been spoilt. In this same year, 1675, a publisher, Bentley, (of whom Dryden afterwards spoke with considerable bitterness) brought out a play called *The Mistaken Husband*, which he stated to have been revised, and to have had a scene added to it by Dryden. Dryden, however, definitely disowned it, and I cannot think that it is in any part his; though it is fair to say that some good judges, notably Mr. Swinburne, think differently.[1] Nearly three years passed without anything of Dryden's appearing, and at last, at the end of 1677, or the beginning of 1678, appeared a play as much better than *Aurengzebe* as *Aurengzebe* was better than its fore-

[1] The list of Dryden's spurious or doubtful works is not large or important. But a note of Pepys, mentioning a play of Dryden entitled *Ladies à la Mode* which was acted and damned in 1668 has puzzled the commentators. There is no trace of this *Ladies à la Mode*. But Mr. E. W. Gosse has in his collection a play entitled *The Moll* or *The Modish Lovers*, which he thinks may possibly be the very "mean thing" of Pepys' scornful mention. The difference of title is not fatal, for Samuel was not over accurate in such matters. The play is anonymous, but the preface is signed J. D. The date is 1674, and the printing is execrable, and evidently not revised by the author, whoever he was. Notwithstanding this the prologue, the epilogue, and a song contain some vigorous verse and phrase sometimes not a little suggestive of Dryden. In the entire absence of external evidence connecting him with it, the question, though one of much interest, is perhaps not one to be dealt with at any length here.

runners. This was *All for Love*, his first drama, in blank verse, and his "only play written for himself." More will be said later on the curious fancy which made him tread in the very steps of Shakespeare. It is sufficient to say now that the attempt, apparently foredoomed to hopeless failure, is, on the contrary, a great success. *Antony and Cleopatra* and *All for Love*, when they are contrasted, only show by the contrast the difference of kind, not the difference of degree, between their writers. The heroic conception has here, in all probability, as favourable exposition given to it as it is capable of, and it must be admitted that it makes a not unfavourable show even without the "dull sweets of rhyme" to drug the audience into good humour with it. The famous scene between Antony and Ventidius divides with the equally famous scene in *Don Sebastian* between Sebastian and Dorax the palm among Dryden's dramatic efforts. But as a whole the play is, I think, superior to *Don Sebastian*. The blank verse, too, is particularly interesting, because it was almost its author's first attempt at that *crux;* and because, for at least thirty years, hardly any tolerable blank verse—omitting of course Milton's—had been written by any one. The model is excellent, and it speaks Dryden's unerring literary sense, that, fresh as he was from the study of *Paradise Lost*, and great as was his admiration for its author, he does not for a moment attempt to confuse the epic and the tragic modes of the style. *All for Love* was, and deserved to be, successful. The play which followed it, *Limberham*, was, and deserved to be, damned. It must be one of the most astonishing things to any one who has not fully grasped the weakness as well as the strength of Dryden's character, that the noble matter and manner of *Aurengzebe*

and *All for Love* should have been followed by this filthy stuff. As a play, it is by no means Dryden's worst piece of work; but, in all other respects, the less said about it the better. During the time of its production the author collaborated with Lee in writing the tragedy of *Œdipus*, in which both the friends are to be seen almost at their best. On Dryden's part, the lyric incantation scenes are perhaps most noticeable, and Lee mingles throughout his usual bombast with his usual splendid poetry. If any one thinks this expression hyperbolical, I shall only ask him to read *Œdipus*, instead of taking the traditional witticisms about Lee for gospel. There is of course plenty of—

> Let gods meet gods and jostle in the dark,

and the other fantastic follies, into which "metaphysical" poetry and "heroic" plays had seduced men of talent, and sometimes of genius; but these can be excused when they lead to such a passage as that where Œdipus cries,—

> Thou coward! yet
> Art living? canst not, wilt not find the road
> To the great palace of magnificent death,
> Though thousand ways lead to his thousand doors
> Which day and night are still unbarred for all.

Œdipus led to a quarrel with the players of the King's Theatre, of the merits of which, as we only have a one-sided statement, it is not easy to judge. But Dryden seems to have formed a connexion about this time with the other or Duke's company, and by them (April, 1679) a "potboiling" adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida* was brought out, which might much better have been left unattempted. Two years afterwards appeared the last play (leaving operas and the scenes contributed to the

Duke of Guise out of the question) that Dryden was to write for many years. This was *The Spanish Friar*, a popular piece, possessed of a good deal of merit, from the technical point of view of the play-wright, but which I think has been somewhat over-rated, as far as literary excellence is concerned. The principal character is no doubt amusing, but he is heavily indebted to Falstaff on the one hand and to Fletcher's Lopez on the other; and he reminds the reader of both his ancestors in a way which cannot but be unfavourable to himself. The play is to me most interesting because of the light it throws on Dryden's grand characteristic, the consummate craftsmanship with which he could throw himself into the popular feeling of the hour. This "Protestant play" is perhaps his most notable achievement of the kind in drama, and it may be admitted that some other achievements of the same kind are less creditable.

Allusion has more than once been made to the very high quality, from the literary point of view, of the songs which appear in nearly all the plays of this long list. They constitute Dryden's chief title to a high rank as a composer of strictly lyrical poetry; and there are indeed few things which better illustrate the range of his genius than these exquisite snatches. At first sight, it would not seem by any means likely that a poet whose greatest triumphs were won in the fields of satire and of argumentative verse should succeed in such things. Ordinary lyric, especially of the graver and more elaborate kind, might not surprise us from such a man. But the song-gift is something distinct from the faculty of ordinary lyrical composition; and there is certainly nothing which necessarily infers it in the pointed declamation and close-ranked argument with which the name of Dryden is

oftenest associated. But the later seventeenth century had a singular gift for such performance—a kind of swan-song, it might be thought, before the death-like slumber which, with few and brief intervals, was to rest upon the English lyric for a hundred years. Dorset, Rochester, even Mulgrave, wrote singularly fascinating songs, as smooth and easy as Moore's, and with far less of the commonplace and vulgar about them. Aphra Behn was an admirable, and Tom Durfey a far from despicable, songster. Even among the common run of play-wrights, who have left no lyrical and not much literary reputation, scraps and snatches with which have the true song stamp are not unfrequently to be found. But Dryden excelled them all in the variety of his cadences and the ring of his lines. Nowhere do we feel more keenly the misfortune of his licence of language, which prevents too many of these charming songs from being now quoted or sung. Their abundance may be illustrated by the fact that a single play, *The Mock Astrologer*, contains no less than four songs of the very first lyrical merit. "You charmed me not with that fair face," is an instance of the well-known common measure which is so specially English, and which is poetry or doggrel according to its cadence. "After the pangs of a desperate lover" is one of the rare examples of a real dactylic metre in English, where the dactyls are not, as usual, equally to be scanned as anapæsts. "Calm was the even, and clear was the sky," is a perfect instance of what may be called archness in song; and "Celimena of my heart," though not much can be said for the matter of it, is at least as much a metrical triumph as any of the others. Nor are the other plays less rich in similar work. The song beginning "Farewell, ungrateful traitor," gives a perfect example of a metre which has been used more

than once in our own days with great success; and "Long between Love and Fear Phyllis tormented," which occurs in *The Assignation*, gives yet another example of the singular fertility with which Dryden devised and managed measures suitable for song. His lyrical faculty impelled him also—especially in his early plays—to luxuriate in incantation scenes, lyrical dialogues, and so forth. These have been ridiculed, not altogether unjustly, in *The Rehearsal;* but the incantation scene in *Œdipus* is very far above the average of such things; and of not a few passages in *King Arthur* at least as much may be said.

Dryden's energy was so entirely occupied with playwriting during this period that he had hardly, it would appear, time or desire to undertake any other work. Towards the middle of it, however, when he had, by poems and plays, already established himself as the greatest living poet—Milton being out of the question—he began to be asked for prologues and epilogues by other poets, or by the actors on the occasion of the revival of old plays. These prologues and epilogues have often been commented upon as one of the most curious literary phenomena of the time. The custom is still, on special occasions, sparingly kept up on the stage; but the prologue, and still more the epilogue, to the Westminster play are the chief living representatives of it. It was usual to comment in these pieces on circumstances of the day, political and other. It was also usual to make personal appeals to the audience for favour and support very much in the manner of the old Trouvères when they commended their wares. But more than all, and worst of all, it was usual to indulge in the extremest licence both of language and meaning. The famous epilogue—one of Dryden's

own—to *Tyrannic Love*, in which Mrs. Eleanor Gwyn, being left for dead on the stage, in the character of St. Catharine, and being about to be carried out by the scene-shifters, exclaims,—

> Hold! are you mad? you damned confounded dog,
> I am to rise and speak the epilogue,

is only a very mild sample of these licences, upon which Macaulay has commented with a severity which is for once absolutely justifiable. There was, however, no poet who had the knack of telling allusion to passing events as Dryden had, and he was early engaged as a prologue writer. The first composition that we have of this kind written for a play not his own is the prologue to *Albumazar*, a curious piece, believed, but not known to have been written by a certain Tomkis in James the First's reign, and ranking among the many which have been attributed with more or less (generally less) show of reason to Shakespeare. Dryden's knowledge of the early English drama was not exhaustive, and he here makes a charge of plagiarism against Ben Jonson, for which there is in all probability not the least ground. The piece contains, however, as do most of these vigorous, though unequal compositions, many fine lines. The next production of the kind not intended for a play of his own is the prologue to the first performance of the king's servants, after they had been burnt out of their theatre, and this is followed by many others. In 1673 a prologue to the University of Oxford, spoken when the *Silent Woman* was acted, is the first of many of the same kind. It has been mentioned that Dryden speaks slightingly of these University prologues, but they are among his best pieces of the class, and are for the most part entirely free from the ribaldry with which

he was but too often wont to alloy them. In these years pieces intended to accompany Carlell's *Arviragus and Philicia*, Etherege's *Man of Mode*, Charles Davenant's *Circe*, Lee's *Mithridates*, Shadwell's *True Widow*, Lee's *Cæsar Borgia*, Tate's *Loyal General*, and not a few others occur. A specimen of the style in which Dryden excelled so remarkably, and which is in itself so utterly dead, may fairly be given here, and nothing can be better for the purpose than the most famous prologue to the University of Oxford. This is the prologue in which the poet at once displays his exquisite capacity for flattery, his command over versification, and his singular antipathy to his own Alma Mater; an antipathy which it may be pointed out is confirmed by the fact of his seeking his master's degree rather at Lambeth than at Cambridge. Whether any solution to the enigma can be found in Dennis's remark that the "younger fry" at Cambridge preferred Settle to their own champion, it would be vain to attempt to determine. The following piece, however, may be taken as a fair specimen of the more decent prologue of the later seventeenth century:—

Though actors cannot much of learning boast,
Of all who want it, we admire it most:
We love the praises of a learned pit,
As we remotely are allied to wit.
We speak our poet's wit, and trade in ore,
Like those, who touch upon the golden shore;
Betwixt our judges can distinction make,
Discern how much, and why, our poems take;
Mark if the fools, or men of sense, rejoice;
Whether the applause be only sound or voice.
When our fop gallants, or our city folly,
Clap over-loud, it makes us melancholy:
We doubt that scene which does their wonder raise,
And, for their ignorance, contemn their praise.

Judge, then, if we who act, and they who write,
Should not be proud of giving you delight.
London likes grossly : but this nicer pit
Examines, fathoms all the depths of wit ;
The ready finger lays on every blot ;
Knows what should justly please, and what should not.
Nature, herself lies open to your view,
You judge, by her, what draught of her is true,
Where outlines false, and colours seem too faint,
Where bunglers daub, and where true poets paint.
But by the sacred genius of this place,
By every Muse, by each domestic grace,
Be kind to wit, which but endeavours well,
And, where you judge, presumes not to excel.
Our poets hither for adoption come,
As nations sued to be made free of Rome ;
Not in the suffragating tribes to stand,
But in your utmost, last, provincial band.
If his ambition may those hopes pursue,
Who with religion loves your arts and you,
Oxford to him a dearer name shall be,
Than his own mother-university.
Thebes did his green, unknowing, youth engage ;
He chooses Athens in his riper age.

During this busy period, Dryden's domestic life had been comparatively uneventful. His eldest son had been born either in 1665 or in 1666, it seems not clear which. His second son, John, was born a year or two later, and the third, Erasmus Henry, in May, 1669. These three sons were all the children Lady Elizabeth brought him. The two eldest went, like their father, to Westminster, and had their schoolboy troubles there, as letters of Dryden still extant show. During the whole period, except in his brief visits to friends and patrons in the country, he was established in the house in Gerrard Street, which is identified with his name.[1] While his children were young, his means must

[1] A house in Fetter Lane, now divided into two, bears a

have been sufficient, and, for those days, considerable. With his patrimony included, Malone has calculated that for great part of the time his income must have been fully 700*l.* a year, equal in purchasing power to 2000*l.* a year in Malone's time, and probably to nearer 3000*l.* now. In June, 1668, the degree of Master of Arts, to which, for some reason or other, Dryden had never proceeded at Cambridge, was, at the recommendation of the king, conferred upon him by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Two years later, in the summer of 1670, he was made poet laureate and historiographer royal.[2] Davenant, the last holder of the laureateship, had died two years previously, and Howell, the well-known author of the *Epistolæ Ho-Elianæ*, and the late holder of the historiographership, four years before. When the two appointments were conferred on Dryden, the salary was fixed in the patent at 200*l.* a year, besides the butt of sack which the economical James afterwards cut off, and arrears since Davenant's death were to be paid. In the same year, 1670 the death of his mother increased his income by the 20*l.* a year which had been payable to him from the Northamptonshire property. From 1667, or thereabouts, Dryden had been in possession of a valuable partnership

plate stating that Dryden lived there. The plate, as I was informed by the present occupiers, replaces a stone slab or inscription which was destroyed in some alterations not very many years ago. I know of no reference to this house in any book, nor does Mr. J. C. Collins, who called my attention to it. If Dryden ever lived here, it must have been between his residence with Herringman and his marriage.

[2] The patent, given by Malone, is dated Aug. 18. Mr. W. Noel Sainsbury, of the Record Office, has pointed out to me a preliminary warrant to "our Attorney or Solicitor Generall" to "prepare a Bill" for the purpose dated April 13.

with the players of the king's house, for whom he contracted to write three plays a year in consideration of a share and a quarter of the profits. Dryden's part of the contract was not performed, it seems, but the actors declare that at any rate for some years their part was, and that the poet's receipts averaged from 300*l.* to 400*l.* a year, besides which he had (sometimes at any rate) the third night, and (we may suppose always) the bookseller's fee for the copyright of the printed play, which together averaged 100*l.* a play or more. Lastly, at the extreme end of the period most probably, but certainly before 1679, the king granted him an additional pension of 100*l.* a year. The importance of this pension is more than merely pecuniary, for this is the grant, the confirmation of which after some delay by James, was taken by Macaulay as the wages of apostasy.

The pecuniary prosperity of this time was accompanied by a corresponding abundance of the good things which generally go with wealth. Dryden was familiar with most of the literary nobles and gentlemen of Charles's court, and Dorset, Etherege, Mulgrave, Sedley, and Rochester were among his special intimates or patrons, whichever word may be preferred. The somewhat questionable boast which he made of this familiarity Nemesis was not long in punishing, and the instrument which Nemesis chose was Rochester himself. It might be said of this famous person, whom Etherege has hit off so admirably in his Dorimant, that he was, except in intellect, the worst of all the courtiers of the time, because he was one of the most radically unamiable. It was truer of him even than of Pope, that he was sure to play some monkey trick or other on those who were unfortunate enough to be his intimates. He had relations with most of the literary men of his time, but

those relations almost always ended badly. Sometimes he set them at each other like dogs, or procured for one some court favour certain to annoy a rival; sometimes he satirized them coarsely in his foul-mouthed poems; sometimes, as we shall see, he forestalled the Chevalier de Rohan in his method of repartee. As early as 1675 Rochester had disobliged Dryden, though the exact amount of the injury has certainly been exaggerated by Malone, whom most biographers, except Mr. Christie, have followed. There is little doubt (though Mr. Christie thinks otherwise) that one of the chief functions of the poet laureate was to compose masques and such like pieces to be acted by the court; indeed, this appears to have been the main regular duty of the office at least in the seventeenth century. That Crowne should have been charged with the composition of *Calisto* was therefore a slight to Dryden. Crowne was not a bad play-wright. He might perhaps by a plagiarism from Lamb's criticism on Heywood be called a kind of prose Dryden, and a characteristic saying of Dryden's, which has been handed down, seems to show that the latter recognized the fact. But the addition to the charge against Rochester that he afterwards interfered to prevent an epilogue, which Dryden wrote for Crowne's piece, from being recited, rests upon absolutely no authority, and it is not even certain that the epilogue referred to was actually written by Dryden.

In the year 1679, however, Dryden had a much more serious taste of Rochester's malevolence. He had recently become very intimate with Lord Mulgrave, who had quarrelled with Rochester. Personal courage was not Rochester's forte, and he had shown the white feather when challenged by Mulgrave. Shortly afterwards there

was circulated in manuscript an *Essay on Satire*, containing virulent attacks on the king, on Rochester and the Duchesses of Cleveland and Portsmouth. How any one could ever have suspected that the poem was Dryden's it is difficult to understand. To begin with, he never at any time in his career lent himself as a hired literary bravo to any private person. In the second place, that he should attack the king from whom he derived the greatest part of his income, was inconceivable. Thirdly, no literary judge could for one moment connect him with the shambling doggrel lines which distinguish the *Essay on Satire* in its original form. A very few couplets have some faint ring of Dryden's verse, but not more than is perceivable in the work of many other poets and poetasters of the time. Lastly, Mulgrave, who, with some bad qualities, was truthful and fearless enough, expressly absolves Dryden as being not only innocent, but ignorant of the whole matter. However, Rochester chose to identify him as the author, and in letters still extant almost expressly states his belief in the fact, and threatens to "leave the repartee to Black Will with a cudgel." On the 18th December, as Dryden was going home at night, through Rose Alley, Covent Garden, he was attacked and beaten by masked men. Fifty pounds reward (deposited at what is now called Childs' Bank) was offered for the discovery of the offenders, and afterwards a pardon was promised to the actual criminals if they would divulge the name of their employer, but nothing came of it. The intelligent critics of the time affected to consider the matter a disgrace to Dryden, and few of the subsequent attacks on him fail to notice it triumphantly. How frequent those attacks soon became the next chapter will show.

CHAPTER IV.

SATIRICAL AND DIDACTIC POEMS.

In the year 1680 a remarkable change came over the character of Dryden's work. Had he died in this year (and he had already reached an age at which many men's work is done) he would not at the present time rank very high even among the second class of English poets. In pure poetry he had published nothing of the slightest consequence for fourteen years, and though there was much admirable work in his dramas, they could as wholes only be praised by allowance. Of late years, too, he had given up the style—rhymed heroic drama—which he had specially made his own. He had been for some time casting about for an opportunity of again taking up strictly poetical work; and as usually happens with the favourites of fortune, a better opportunity than any he could have elaborated for himself was soon presented to him. The epic poem which, as he tells us, he intended to write, would doubtless have contained many fine passages and much splendid versification; but it almost certainly would not have been the best thing in its kind even in its own language. The series of satirical and didactic poems which, in the space of less than seven years he was now to produce, occupies the position which the epic would almost to a certainty have failed to attain. Not only is there

nothing better of their own kind in English, but it may almost be said that there is nothing better in any other literary language. Satire, argument, and exposition may possibly be half-spurious kinds of poetry—that is a question which need not be argued here. But among satirical and didactic poems *Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Medal*, *Macflecknoe*, *Religio Laici*, *The Hind and the Panther*, hold the first place in company with very few rivals. In a certain kind of satire to be defined presently they have no rival at all; and in a certain kind of argumentative exposition they have no rival except in Lucretius.

It is probable that, until he was far advanced in middle life, Dryden had paid but little attention to political and religious controversies, though he was well enough versed in their terms, and had a logical and almost scholastic mind. I have already endeavoured to show the unlikeliness of his ever having been a very fervent Roundhead, and I do not think that there is much more probability of his having been a very fervent Royalist. His literary work, his few friendships, and the tavern-coffeehouse life which took up so much of the time of the men of that day, probably occupied him sufficiently in the days of his earlier manhood. He was loyal enough, no doubt, not merely in lip-loyalty, and was perfectly ready to furnish an *Amboyna* or anything else that was wanted; but for the first eighteen years of Charles the Second's reign, the nation at large felt little interest, of the active kind, in political questions. Dryden almost always reflected the sympathies of the nation at large. The Popish Plot, however, and the dangerous excitement which the misgovernment of Charles on the one hand and the machinations of Shaftesbury on the other produced, found him at an age when serious subjects are at any rate by courtesy supposed to possess

greater attractions than they exert in youth. Tradition has it that he was more or less directly encouraged by Charles to write one, if not two, of the poems which in a few months made him the first satirist in Europe. It is possible, for Charles had a real if not a very lively interest in literature, was a sound enough critic in his way, and had ample shrewdness to perceive the advantage to his own cause which he might gain by enlisting Dryden. However this may be, *Absalom and Achitophel* was published about the middle of November, 1681, a week or so before the grand jury threw out the bill against Shaftesbury on a charge of high treason. At no time before, and hardly at any time since, did party-spirit run higher, and though the immediate object of the poem was defeated by the fidelity of the brisk boys of the city to their leader, there is no question that the poem worked powerfully among the influences which after the most desperate struggle, short of open warfare, in which any English sovereign has ever been engaged, finally won for Charles the victory over the Exclusionists, by means at least ostensibly constitutional and legitimate. It is, however, with the literary rather than with the political aspect of the matter that we are here concerned.

The story of Absalom and Achitophel has obvious capacities for political adaptation, and it had been more than once so used in the course of the century, indeed (it would appear), in the course of the actual political struggle in which Dryden now engaged. Like many other of the greatest writers, Dryden was wont to carry out Molière's principle to the fullest, and to care very little for technical originality of plan or main idea. The form which his poem took was also in many ways suggested by the prevailing literary tastes of the day. Both in France and in

England the character or portrait, a set description of a given person in prose or verse, had for some time been fashionable. Clarendon in the one country, Saint Evremond in the other, had in particular composed prose portraits which have never been surpassed. Dryden accordingly made his poem little more than a string of such portraits, connected together by the very slenderest thread of narrative, and interspersed with occasional speeches in which the arguments of his own side were put in a light as favourable, and those of the other in a light as unfavourable as possible. He was always very careless of anything like a regular plot for his poems—a carelessness rather surprising in a practised writer for the stage. But he was probably right in neglecting this point. The subjects with which he dealt were of too vital an interest to his readers to allow them to stay and ask the question, whether the poems had a beginning, a middle, and an end. Sharp personal satire and biting political denunciation needed no such setting as this, a setting which to all appearance Dryden was as unable as he was unwilling to give. He could, however, and did give other things of much greater importance. The wonderful command over the couplet of which he had displayed the beginnings in his early poems, and which had in twenty years of play-writing been exercised and developed, till its owner was in as thorough training as a professional athlete, was the first of these. The second was a faculty of satire, properly so called, which was entirely novel. The third was a faculty of specious argument in verse which, as has been said, no one save Lucretius has ever equalled, and which, if it falls short of the great Roman's in logical exactitude, hardly falls short of it in poetical ornament, and excels it in a sort of triumphant vivacity which hurries the

reader along, whether he will or no. All these three gifts are almost indifferently exemplified in the series of poems now under discussion, and each of them may deserve a little consideration before we proceed to give account of the poems themselves.

The versification of English satire before Dryden had been almost without exception harsh and rugged. There are whole passages of Marston and of Donne, as well as more rarely of Hall, which can only be recognized for verse by the rattle of the rhymes and by a diligent scansion with the finger. Something the same, allowing for the influence of Waller and his school, may be said of Marvell and even of Oldham. Meanwhile the octosyllabic satire of Cleveland, Butler and others, though less violently uncouth than the decasyllables, was purposely grotesque. There is some difference of opinion as to how far the heroic satirists themselves were intentionally rugged. Donne, when he chose, could write with perfect sweetness, and Marston could be smooth enough in blank verse. It has been thought that some mistaken classical tradition made the early satirists adopt their jaw-breaking style, and there may be something to be said for this. But I think that regard must, in fairness, also be had to the very imperfect command of the couplet which they possessed. The languid cadence of its then ordinary form was unsuited for satire, and the satirists had not the art of quickening and varying it. Hence the only resource was to make it as like prose as possible. But Dryden was in no such case. His native gifts and his enormous practice in play-writing had made the couplet as natural a vehicle to him for any form of discourse as blank verse or as plain prose. The form of it too, which he had most affected, was specially suited for satire. In the first place this form had, as has already

been noted, a remarkably varied cadence; in the second, its strong antitheses and smart telling hits lent themselves to personal description and attack with consummate ease. There are passages of Dryden's satires in which every couplet has not only the force but the actual sound of a slap in the face. The rapidity of movement from one couplet to the other is another remarkable characteristic. Even Pope, master as he was of verse, often fell into the fault of isolating his couplets too much, as if he expected applause between each, and wished to give time for it. Dryden's verse on the other hand strides along with a careless Olympian motion, as if the writer were looking at his victims rather with a kind of good-humoured scorn than with any elaborate triumph.

This last remark leads us naturally to the second head, the peculiar character of Dryden's satire itself. In this respect it is at least as much distinguished from its predecessors as in the former. There had been a continuous tradition among satirists that they must affect immense moral indignation at the evils they attacked. Juvenal and still more Persius are probably responsible for this, and even Dryden's example did not put an end to the practice, for in the next century it is found in persons upon whom it sits with singular awkwardness, such as Churchill and Lloyd. Now this moral indignation, apt to be rather tiresome when the subject is purely ethical—Marston is a glaring example of this—becomes quite intolerable when the subject is political. It never does for the political satirist to lose his temper and to rave and rant and denounce with the air of an inspired prophet. Dryden, and perhaps Dryden alone, has observed this rule. As I have just observed, his manner towards his subjects is that of a cool and not ill-humoured scorn. They are great scoundrels certainly, but

They are probably even more contemptible than they are vicious. The well-known line—

They got a villain and we lost a fool,

expresses this attitude admirably, and the attitude in its turn explains the frantic rage which Dryden's satire produced in his opponents. There is yet another peculiarity of this satire in which it stands almost alone. Most satirists are usually prone to the error of attacking either mere types, or else individuals too definitely marked as individuals. The first is the fault of Regnier and all the minor French satirists, the second is the fault of Pope. In the first case the point and zest of the thing are apt to be lost, and the satire becomes a declamation against vice and folly in the abstract. In the second case a suspicion of personal pique comes in, and it is felt that the requirement of art, the disengagement of the general law from the individual instance, is not sufficiently attended to. Regnier perhaps only in Macette, Pope perhaps only in Atticus, escape this Scylla and this Charybdis. But Dryden rarely or never falls into either's grasp. His figures are always at once types and individuals. Zimri is at once Buckingham and the idle grand seigneur who plays at politics and at learning, Achitophel at once Shaftesbury and the abstract intriguer, Shimei at once Bethel and the sectarian politician of all days. It is to be noticed also that in drawing these satirical portraits, the poet has exercised a singular judgment in selecting his traits. If *Absalom and Achitophel* be compared with the replies it called forth, this is especially noticeable. Shadwell, for instance, in the almost incredibly scurrilous libel which he put forth in answer to the *Medal*, accuses Dryden of certain definite misdoings

and mis-sayings most of which are unbelievable while others are inconclusive. Dryden on the other hand in the character of Og confines himself in the adroitest way to generalities. These generalities are not only much more effective, but also much more difficult of disproval. When, to recur to the already quoted and typical line attacking the unlucky Johnson, Dryden says—

> They got a villain, and we lost a fool,

it is obviously useless for the person assailed to sit down and write a rejoinder tending to prove that he is neither one nor the other. He might clear himself from the charge of villainy, but only at the inevitable cost of establishing that of folly. But when Shadwell, in unquotable verses, says to Dryden, on this or that day you did such and such a discreditable thing, the reply is obvious. In the first place the charge can be disproved, in the second it can be disdained. When Dryden himself makes such charges it is always in a casual and allusive way, as if there were no general dissent as to the truth of his allegation, while he takes care to be specially happy in his language. The disgraceful insinuation against Forbes, the famous if irreverent dismissal of Lord Howard of Escrick—

> And canting Nadab let oblivion damn,
> Who made new porridge for the paschal lamb,

justify themselves by their form if not by their matter. It has also to be noted that Dryden's facts are rarely disputable. The famous passage in which Settle and Shadwell are yoked in a sentence of discriminating damnation is an admirable example of this. It is absolutely true that Settle had a certain faculty of writing, though the matter

of his verse was worthless; and it is absolutely true that Shadwell wrote worse, and was in some respects a duller man, than any person of equal talents placed among English men of letters. There could not possibly be a more complete justification of *Macflecknoe* than the victim's complaint that "he had been represented as an Irishman, though Dryden knew perfectly well that he had only once been in Ireland, and that was but for a few hours."

Lastly has to be noticed Dryden's singular faculty of verse argument. He was, of course, by no means the first didactic poet of talent in England. Sir John Davies is usually mentioned specially as his forerunner, and there were others who would deserve notice in a critical history of English poetry. But Dryden's didactic poems are quite unlike anything which came before them, and have never been approached by anything that has come after them. Doubtless they prove nothing; indeed, the chief of them, *The Hind and the Panther*, is so entirely desultory that it could not prove anything; but at the same time they have a remarkable air of proving something. Dryden had, in reality, a considerable touch of the scholastic in his mind. He delights at all times in the formulas of the schools, and his various literary criticisms are frequently very fair specimens of deductive reasoning. The bent of his mind, moreover, was of that peculiar kind which delights in arguing a point. Something of this may be traced in the singular variety, not to say inconsistency, even of his literary judgments. He sees, for the time being, only the point which he has set himself to prove, and is quite careless of the fact that he has proved something very different yesterday, and is very likely to prove something different still to-morrow. But for the purposes of didactic poetry he had special equipments unconnected with his merely

logical power. He was at all times singularly happy and fertile in the art of illustration, and of concealing the weakness of an argument in the most convincing way, by a happy simile or jest. He steered clear of the rock on which Lucretius has more than once gone nigh to split—the repetition of dry formulas and professional terms. In the *Hind and Panther*, indeed, the argument is, in great part, composed of narrative and satirical portraiture. The Fable of the Pigeons, the Character of the Buzzard, and a dozen more such things, certainly prove as little as the most determined enemy of the *belles lettres* could wish. But *Religio Laici*, which is our best English didactic poem, is not open to this charge, and is really a very good piece of argument. Weaknesses here and there are, of course, adroitly patched over with ornament, but still the whole possesses a very fair capacity of holding water. Here, too, the peculiar character of Dryden's poetic style served him well. He speaks with surely affected depreciation of the style of the *Religio* as "unpolished and rugged." In reality it is a model of the plainer sort of verse, and nearer to his own admirable prose than anything else that can be cited.

One thing more, and a thing of the greatest importance, has to be said about Dryden's satirical poems. There never perhaps was a satirist who less abused his power for personal ends. He only attacked Settle and Shadwell after both had assailed him in the most virulent and unprovoked fashion. Many of the minor assailants whom, as we shall see, *Absalom and Achitophel* raised up against him, he did not so much as notice. On the other hand no kind of personal grudge can be traced in many of his most famous passages. The character of Zimri was not only perfectly true and just, but was also a fair literary tit-for-tat

in return for the *Rehearsal;* nor did Buckingham's foolish rejoinder provoke the poet to say another word. Last of all, in no part of his satires is there the slightest reflection on Rochester, notwithstanding the disgraceful conduct of which he had been guilty. Rochester was dead, leaving no heirs and very few friends, so that at any time during the twenty years which Dryden survived him satirical allusion would have been safe and easy. But Dryden was far too manly to war with the dead, and far too manly even to indulge, as his great follower did, in vicious flings at the living.

Absalom and Achitophel is perhaps, with the exception of the St. Cecilia ode, the best known of all Dryden's poems to modern readers, and there is no need to give any very lengthy account of it, or of the extraordinary skill with which Monmouth is treated. The sketch, even now about the best existing in prose or verse, of the Popish Plot, the character and speeches of Achitophel, the unapproached portrait of Zimri, and the final harangue of David, have for generations found their places in every book of elegant extracts, either for general or school use. But perhaps the most characteristic passage of the whole, as indicating the kind of satire which Dryden now introduced for the first time, is the passage descriptive of Shimei—Slingsby Bethel —the Republican sheriff of the city :—

> But he, though bad, is followed by a worse,
> The wretch, who heaven's anointed dared to curse;
> Shimei—whose youth did early promise bring
> Of zeal to God, and hatred to his King—
> Did wisely from expensive sins refrain,
> And never broke the sabbath but for gain:
> Nor ever was he known an oath to vent,
> Or curse, unless against the government.

Thus heaping wealth, by the most ready way
Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray;
The City, to reward his pious hate
Against his master, chose him magistrate.
His hand a vare of justice did uphold,
His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.
During his office treason was no crime,
The sons of Belial had a glorious time:
For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,
Yet loved his wicked neighbour as himself.
When two or three were gathered to declaim
Against the monarch of Jerusalem,
Shimei was always in the midst of them:
And, if they cursed the King when he was by,
Would rather curse than break good company.
If any durst his factious friends accuse,
He packed a jury of dissenting Jews;
Whose fellow-feeling in the godly cause
Would free the suffering saint from human laws:
For laws are only made to punish those
Who serve the king, and to protect his foes.
If any leisure time he had from power,
Because 'tis sin to misemploy an hour,
His business was, by writing to persuade,
That kings were useless, and a clog to trade:
And that his noble style he might refine,
No Rechabite more shunned the fumes of wine.
Chaste were his cellars, and his shrieval board
The grossness of a city feast abhorred:
His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot;
Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.
Such frugal virtue malice may accuse,
But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:
For towns, once burnt, such magistrates require,
As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.
With spiritual food he fed his servants well,
But free from flesh, that made the Jews rebel:
And Moses' laws he held in more account,
For forty days of fasting in the mount.

There had been nothing in the least like this before.

The prodigality of irony, the sting in the tail of every couplet, the ingenuity by which the odious charges are made against the victim in the very words almost of the phrases which his party were accustomed to employ, and above all the polish of the language and the verse, and the tone of half-condescending banter, were things of which that time had no experience. The satire was as bitter as Butler's but less grotesque and less laboured.

It was not likely that at a time when pamphlet-writing was the chief employment of professional authors, and when the public mind was in the hottest state of excitement, such an onslaught as *Absalom and Achitophel* should remain unanswered. In three weeks from its appearance a parody, entitled *Towser the Second*, attacking Dryden, was published, the author of which is said to have been Henry Care. A few days later Buckingham proved, with tolerable convincingness, how small had been his own share in the *Rehearsal*, by putting forth some *Poetical Reflections* of the dreariest kind. Him followed an anonymous Nonconformist with *A Whip for the Fool's Back*, a performance which exposed his own back to a much more serious flagellation in the preface to the *Medal*. Next came Samuel Pordage's *Azaria and Hushai*. This work of "Lame Mephibosheth, the wizard's son," is weak enough in other respects, but shows that Dryden had already taught several of his enemies how to write. Lastly, Settle published *Absalom Senior*, perhaps the worst of all the replies, though containing evidences of its author's faculty for "rhyming and rattling." Of these and of subsequent replies Scott has given ample selections, ample, that is to say, for the general reader. But the student of Dryden can hardly appreciate his author fully, or estimate

the debt which the English language owes to him unless he has read at least some of them in full.

The popularity of *Absalom and Achitophel* was immense and its sale rapid; but the main object, the overthrowing of Shaftesbury, was not accomplished, and a certain triumph was even gained for that turbulent leader by the failure of the prosecution against him. This failure was celebrated by the striking of a medal with the legend *Laetamur*. Thereupon Dryden wrote the *Medal*. A very precise but probably apocryphal story is told by Spence of its origin. Charles, he says, was walking with Dryden in the Mall, and said to him, "If I were a poet, and I think I am poor enough to be one, I would write a poem on such a subject in such a manner," giving him at the same time hints for the *Medal*, which, when finished, was rewarded with a hundred broad pieces. The last part of the story is not very credible, for the king was not extravagant towards literature. The first is unlikely, because he was, in the first place, too much of a gentleman to reproach a man to whom he was speaking with the poverty of his profession; and, in the second, too shrewd not to see that he laid himself open to a damaging repartee. However, the story is not impossible, and that is all that can be said of it. The *Medal* came out in March, 1682. It is a much shorter and a much graver poem than *Absalom and Achitophel*, extending to little more than 300 lines, and containing none of the picturesque personalities which had adorned its predecessor. Part of it is a bitter invective against Shaftesbury, part an argument as to the unfitness of republican institutions for England, and the rest an "Address to the Whigs," as the prose preface is almost exclusively. The language of the poem is nervous, its versification less lively than that of *Ab-*

salom and Achitophel, but not less careful. It is noticeable, too, that the *Medal* contains a line of fourteen syllables,

> Thou leap'st o'er all eternal truths in thy Pindaric way.

The Alexandrine was already a favourite device of Dryden's, but he has seldom elsewhere tried the seven-foot verse as a variation. Strange to say it is far from inharmonious in its place, and has a certain connexion with the sense, though the example certainly cannot be recommended for universal imitation. I cannot remember any instance in another poet of such a licence except the well-known three in the *Revolt of Islam*, which may be thought to be covered by Shelley's prefatory apology.

The direct challenge to the Whigs which the preface contained was not likely to go unanswered; and indeed Dryden had described in it with exact irony the character of the replies he received. Pordage returned to the charge with the *Medal Reversed;* the admirers of Somers hope that he did not write *Dryden's Satire to his Muse;* and there were many others. But one of them, the *Medal of John Bayes*, is of considerably greater importance. It was written by Thomas Shadwell, and is perhaps the most scurrilous piece of ribaldry which has ever got itself quoted in English literature. The author gives a life of Dryden, accusing him pell-mell of all sorts of disgraceful conduct and unfortunate experiences. His adulation of Oliver, his puritanic relations, his misfortunes at Cambridge, his marriage, his intrigues with Mrs. Reeve, &c., &c., are all raked up or invented for the purpose of throwing obloquy on him. The attack passed all bounds of decency, especially as it had not been provoked by any personality towards Shadwell, and for once Dryden resolved to make an example of his assailant.

Thomas Shadwell was a Norfolk man and about ten years Dryden's junior. Ever since the year 1668 he had been writing plays (chiefly comedies) and hanging about town, and Dryden and he had been in a manner friends. They had joined Crowne in the task of writing down the *Empress of Morocco*, and it does not appear that Dryden had ever given Shadwell any direct cause of offence. Shadwell, however, who was exceedingly arrogant and apparently jealous of Dryden's acknowledged position as leader of the English drama, took more than one occasion of sneering at Dryden, and especially at his critical prefaces. Not long before the actual declaration of war Shadwell had received a prologue from Dryden, and the outbreak itself was due to purely political causes, though no doubt Shadwell, who was a sincere Whig and Protestant, was very glad to pour out his pent-up literary jealousy at the same time. The personality of his attack on Dryden was, however, in the last degree unwise; for the house in which he lived was of glass almost all over. His manners are admitted to have been coarse and brutal, his conversation unclean, his appearance uninviting; nor was his literary personality safer from attack. He had taken Ben Jonson for his model, and any reader of his comedies must admit that he had a happy knack of detecting or imagining the oddities which, after Ben's example, he called "humours." The *Sullen Lovers* is in this way a much more genuinely amusing play than any of Dryden's, and the *Squire of Alsatia*, *Bury Fair*, *Epsom Wells*, the *Virtuoso*, &c., are comedies of manners by no means unimportant for the social history of the time. But whether it was owing to haste, as Rochester pretended, or, as Dryden would have it, to certain intellectual incapacities, there can be no doubt that nobody ever made less use of his faculties than

Shadwell. His work is always disgraceful as writing; he seems to have been totally destitute of any critical faculty, and he mixes up what is really funny with the dullest and most wearisome folly and ribaldry. He was thus given over entirely into Dryden's hands, and the unmatched satire of *MacFlecknoe* was the result.

Flecknoe, whom but for this work no one would ever have inquired about, was, and had been for some time, a stock-subject for allusive satire. He was an Irish priest who had died not long before, after writing a little good verse and a great deal of bad. He had paid compliments to Dryden, and there is no reason to suppose that Dryden had any enmity towards him; his part indeed is simply representative, and the satire is reserved for Shadwell. Well as they are known, the first twenty or thirty lines of the poem must be quoted once more, for illustration of Dryden's satirical faculty is hardly possible without them:—

All human things are subject to decay,
And, when fate summons, monarchs must obey.
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
Was called to empire, and had governed long;
In prose and verse was owned without dispute,
Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.
This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,
And blessed with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the state;
And, pondering which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,
Cried—"'Tis resolved! for nature pleads, that he
Should only rule, who most resembles me.
Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dulness from his tender years;
Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.

> The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
> But Shadwell never deviates into sense.
> Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
> Strike through and make a lucid interval;
> But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,
> His rising fogs prevail upon the day.
> Besides, his goodly fabric fills the eye,
> And seems designed for thoughtless majesty;
> Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain,
> And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign."

MacFlecknoe was published in October, 1682, but Dryden had not done with Shadwell. A month later came out the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, in which Nahum Tate took up the story. Tate copied the versification of his master with a good deal of success, though as it is known that Dryden gave strokes almost all through the poem, it is difficult exactly to apportion the other laureate's part. But the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* would assuredly never be opened were it not for a long passage of about 200 lines, which is entirely Dryden's, and which contains some of his very best work. Unluckily it contains also some of his greatest licences of expression, to which he was probably provoked by the unparalleled language which, as has been said, Shadwell and others had used to him. The 200 lines which he gave Tate are one string of characters, each more savage and more masterly than the last. Ferguson, Forbes, and Johnson are successively branded, Pordage has his ten syllables of immortalizing contempt, and then come the famous characters of Doeg (Settle) and Og (Shadwell),—

> Two fools that crutch their feeble sense on verse,
> Who by my muse to all succeeding times
> Shall live, in spite of their own doggrel rhymes.

The coarseness of speech before alluded to makes it im-

possible to quote these characters as a whole, but a *cento* is fortunately possible with little loss of vigour.

Doeg, though without knowing how or why,
Made still a blundering kind of melody;
Spurred boldly on, and dashed through thick and thin,
Through sense and nonsense, never out nor in;
Free from all meaning, whether good or bad,
And, in one word, heroically mad,
He was too warm on picking-work to dwell,
But fagoted his notions as they fell,
And, if they rhymed and rattled, all was well.
Railing in other men may be a crime,
But ought to pass for mere instinct in him;
Instinct he follows, and no farther knows,
For, to write verse with him is to *transprose*;
'Twere pity treason at his door to lay,
Who makes *heaven's gate a lock to its own key*;
Let him rail on, let his invective muse
Have four-and-twenty letters to abuse.
Which, if he jumbles to one line of sense,
Indict him of a capital offence.
In fire-works give him leave to vent his spite,
Those are the only serpents he can write;
The height of his ambition is, we know,
But to be master of a puppet-show;
On that one stage his works may yet appear,
And a month's harvest keep him all the year.
Now stop your noses, readers, all and some,
For here's a tun of midnight work to come,
Og from a treason-tavern rolling home.
Round as a globe, and liquored every chink,
Goodly and great he sails behind his link.
With all this bulk there's nothing lost in Og,
For every inch, that is not fool, is rogue.
The midwife laid her hand on his thick skull,
With this prophetic blessing—Be thou dull!
Drink, swear and roar; forbear no lewd delight
Fit for thy bulk, do anything but write.
Thou art of lasting make, like thoughtless men,
A strong nativity—but for the pen;

Eat opium, mingle arsenic in thy drink,
Still thou mayest live, avoiding pen and ink.
I see, I see, 'tis counsel given in vain,
For treason, botched in rhyme, will be thy bane;
Rhyme is the rock on which thou art to wreck,
'Tis fatal to thy fame and to thy neck.'
Why should thy metre good king David blast?
A psalm of his will surely be thy last.
A double noose thou on thy neck dost pull
For writing treason, and for writing dull:
To die for faction is a common evil,
But to be hanged for nonsense is the devil.
Hadst thou the glories of thy king exprest,
Thy praises had been satire at the best;
But thou in clumsy verse, unlickt, unpointed,
Hast shamefully defied the Lord's anointed:
I will not rake the dunghill of thy crimes,
For who would read thy life that reads thy rhymes?
But of king David's foes, be this the doom,
May all be like the young man Absalom;
And for my foes may this their blessing be,
To talk like Doeg, and to write like thee.

No one, I think, can fail to recognize here the qualities which have already been set forth as specially distinguishing Dryden's satire, the fund of truth at the bottom of it, the skilful adjustment of the satire so as to make faults of the merits which are allowed, the magnificent force and variety of the verse, and the constant maintenance of a kind of superior contempt never degenerating into mere railing or losing its superiority in petty spite. The last four verses in especial might almost be taken as a model of satirical verse.

These verses were the last that Dryden wrote in the directly satirical way. His four great poems—the two parts of *Absalom and Achitophel*, the *Medal*, and *MacFlecknoe*, had been produced in rather more than a year, and, high as was his literary position before, had exalted

him infinitely higher. From this time forward there could be no doubt at all of his position, with no second at any moderate distance, at the head of living Englishmen of letters. He was now to earn a new title to this position. Almost simultaneously with the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* appeared *Religio Laici*.

Scott has described *Religio Laici* as one of the most admirable poems in the language, which in some respects it undoubtedly is; but it is also one of the most singular. That a man who had never previously displayed any particular interest in theological questions, and who had reached the age of fifty-one, with a reputation derived, until quite recently, in the main from the composition of loose plays, should appear before his public of pleasure-seekers with a serious argument in verse on the credibility of the Christian religion and the merits of the Anglican form of doctrine and church government would nowadays be something more than a nine days' wonder. In Dryden's time it was somewhat less surprising. The spirit of theological controversy was bred in the bone of the seventeenth century. It will always remain an instance of the subordination in Macaulay of the judicial to the advocating faculty, that he who knew the time so well should have adduced the looseness of Dryden's plays as an argument against the sincerity of his conversion. It is quite certain that James the Second was both a man of loose life and of thoroughly sincere religious belief; it is by no means certain that his still more profligate brother's unbelief was not a mere assumption, and generally it may be noted that the biographies of the time never seem to infer any connexion between irregularity of life and unsoundness of religious faith. I have already shown some cause for disbelieving the stories, or rather the assertions, of Dryden's

profligacy, though even these would not be conclusive against his sincerity; but I believe that it would be difficult to trace any very active concern in him for things religious before the Popish Plot. Various circumstances already noticed may then have turned his mind to the subject, and that active and vigorous mind when it once attacked a subject rarely deserted it. Consistency was in no matter Dryden's great characteristic, and the arguments of *Religio Laici* are not more inconsistent with the arguments of *The Hind and the Panther* than the handling of the question of rhymed plays in the *Essay of dramatic poesy* is with the arguments against them in the prefaces and dissertations subsequent to *Aureng-zebe*.

It has sometimes been sought to give *Religio Laici* a political as well as a religious sense, and to connect it in this way with the series of political satires, with the *Duke of Guise* and with the subsequent *Hind and Panther*. The connexion, however, seems to me to be faint. The struggles of the Popish Plot had led to the contests on the Exclusion Bill on the one hand, and they had re-opened the controversial question between the Churches of England and Rome on the other. They had thus in different ways given rise to *Absalom and Achitophel* and to *Religio Laici*, but the two poems have no community but a community of origin. Indeed, the suspicion of any political design in *Religio Laici* is not only groundless but contradictory. The views of James on the subject were known to every one, and those of Charles himself are not likely to have been wholly hidden from an assiduous follower of the court, and a friend of the king's greatest intimates, like Dryden. Still less is it necessary to take account of the absurd suggestion that

Dryden wrote the poem as a stepping-stone to orders and to ecclesiastical preferment. He has definitely denied that he had at any time thoughts of entering the church, and such thoughts are certainly not likely to have occurred to him at the age of fifty. The poem therefore, as it seems to me, must be regarded as a genuine production, expressing the author's first thoughts on a subject which had just presented itself to him as interesting and important. Such first thoughts in a mind like Dryden's, which was by no means a revolutionary mind, and which was disposed to accept the church as part and parcel of the Tory system of principles, were pretty certain to take the form of an apologetic harmonizing of difficulties and doubts. The author must have been familiar with the usual objections of the persons vaguely called Hobbists, and with the counter-objections of the Romanists. He takes them both and he makes the best of them.

In its form and arrangement *Religio Laici* certainly deserves the praise which critics have given it. Dryden's overtures are very generally among the happiest parts of his poems, and the opening ten or twelve lines of this poem are among his very best. The bold *enjambement* of the first two couplets, with the striking novelty of cadence given by the sharply cut *cæsura* of the third line, is one of his best metrical effects, and the actual picture of the cloudy night-sky and the wandering traveller matches the technical beauty of the verse. The rest of the poem is studiously bare of ornament, and almost exclusively argumentative. There is and could be nothing specially novel or extraordinarily forcible in the arguments; but they are put with that ease and apparent cogency which have been already remarked upon as characterizing all Dryden's didactic work. The poem is not without

touches of humour, and winds up with a characteristic but not ill-humoured fling at the unhappy Shadwell.

Dryden's next productions of importance were two odes of the so-called Pindaric kind. The example of Cowley had made this style very popular; but Dryden himself had not practised it. The years 1685-6 gave him occasion to do so. His *Threnodia Augustalis* or funeral poem on Charles the Second may be taken as the chief official production of his laureateship. The difficulties of such performances are well known, and the reproaches brought against their faults are pretty well stereotyped. *Threnodia Augustalis* is not exempt from the faults of its kind; but it has merits which for that kind are decidedly unusual. The stanza which so adroitly at once praises and satirizes Charles's patronage of literary men is perhaps the best, and certainly the best known; but the termination is also fine. Of very different merit, however, is the *Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Anne Killegrew*. This elegy is among the best of many noble funeral poems which Dryden wrote. The few lines on the Marquis of Winchester, the incomparable address to Oldham—"Farewell, too little and too lately known"—and at a later date the translated epitaph on Claverhouse are all remarkable; but the Killegrew elegy is of far greater importance. It is curious that in these days of selections no one has attempted a collection of the best regular and irregular odes in English. There are not many of them, but a small anthology could be made reaching from Milton to Mr. Swinburne, which would contain some remarkable poetry. Among these the ode to Anne Killegrew would assuredly hold a high place. Johnson pronounced it the noblest in the language, and in his time it certainly was, unless *Lycidas* be called an ode. Since its time there

has been Wordsworth's great immortality ode, and certain beautiful but fragmentary pieces of Shelley which might be so classed; but till our own days nothing else which can match this. The first stanza may be pronounced absolutely faultless and incapable of improvement. As a piece of concerted music in verse it has not a superior, and Warton's depreciation of it is a curious instance of the lack of catholic taste which has so often marred English criticism of poetry:—

Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies,
Made in the last promotion of the blessed;
Whose palms, new plucked from Paradise,
In spreading branches more sublimely rise,
Rich with immortal green above the rest:
Whether, adopted to some neighbouring star,
Thou rollest above us, in thy wandering race,
Or, in procession fixed and regular,
Movest with the heaven's majestic pace;
Or, called to more superior bliss,
Thou treadest with seraphims the vast abyss:
Whatever happy region is thy place,
Cease thy celestial song a little space;
Thou wilt have time enough for hymns divine,
Since Heaven's eternal year is thine.
Hear, then, a mortal Muse thy praise rehearse,
In no ignoble verse;
But such as thy own voice did practise here,
When thy first fruits of Poesy were given,
To make thyself a welcome inmate there;
While yet a young probationer,
And candidate of heaven.

These smaller pieces were followed at some interval by the remarkable poem which is Dryden's chief work, if bulk and originality of plan are taken into consideration. There is a tradition as to the place of composition of *The Hind and the Panther*, which in many respects deserves

to be true, though there is apparently no direct testimony to its truth. It is said to have been written at Rushton not far from Kettering, in the poet's native county. Rushton had been (though it had passed from them at this time) the seat of the Treshams, one of the staunchest families to the old faith which Dryden had just embraced. They had held another seat in Northamptonshire—Lyveden, within a few miles of Aldwinkle and of all the scenes of the poet's youth; and both at Lyveden and Rushton, architectural evidences of their devotion to the cause survive in the shape of buildings covered with symbolical carvings. The neighbourhood of Rushton, too, is singularly consonant to the scenery of the poem. It lay just on the southern fringe of the great forest of Rockingham, and the neighbourhood is still wonderfully timbered, though most of the actual wood owes its existence to the planting energy of Duke John of Montagu, half a century after Dryden's time. It would certainly not have been easy to conceive a better place for the conception and execution of this sylvan poem; but, as a matter of fact, it seems impossible to obtain any definite evidence of the connexion between the two.

The Hind and the Panther is in plan a sort of combination of *Absalom and Achitophel*, and of *Religio Laici*, but its three parts are by no means homogeneous. The first part, which is perhaps on the whole the best, contains the well-known apportionment of the characters of different beasts to the different churches and sects; the second contains the major part of the controversy between the Hind and the Panther; the third, which is as long as the other two put together, continues this controversy, but before very long diverges into allegorical and personal satire. The story of the Swallows, which the Panther

tells, is one of the liveliest of all Dryden's pieces of narration, and it is not easy to give the palm between it and the Hind's retort, the famous fable of the Doves, in which Burnet is caricatured with hardly less vigour and not much less truth than Buckingham and Shadwell in the satires proper. This told, the poem ends abruptly.

The Hind and the Panther was certain to provoke controversy, especially from the circumstances, presently to be discussed, under which it was written. Dryden had two points especially vulnerable, the one being personal the other literary. It was inevitable that his argument in *Religio Laici* should be contrasted with his argument in *The Hind and the Panther*. It was inevitable on the other hand that the singularities of construction in the latter poem should meet with animadversion. No defender of *The Hind and the Panther*, indeed, has ever attempted to defend it as a regular or classically proportioned piece of work. Its main theme is, as always with Dryden, merely a canvas whereon to embroider all sorts of episodes, digressions and ornaments. Yet his adversaries, in their blind animosity, went a great deal too far in the matter of condemnation, and showed themselves entirely ignorant of the history and requirements of allegory in general, and the beast-fable in particular. Dryden, like many other great men of letters, had an admiration for the incomparable story of Reynard the fox. It is characteristic, both of his enemies and of the age, that this was made a serious argument against him. This is specially done in a celebrated little pamphlet which has perhaps had the honour of being more overpraised than anything else of its kind in English literature. If any one wishes to appraise the value of the story that Dryden was seriously vexed by *The Hind and the Panther trans-*

versed to the Story of the City and Country Mouse, he cannot do better than read that production. It is difficult to say what was or was not unworthy of Montague, whose published poems certainly do not authorize us to say that he wrote below himself on this occasion, but it assuredly is in the highest degree unworthy of Prior. Some tolerable parody of Dryden's own work, a good deal of heavy joking closely modelled on the *Rehearsal* and assigning to Mr. Bayes plenty of "i'gads" and the like catchwords, make up the staple of this piece, in which Mr. Christie has discovered "true wit," and the Quarterly Reviewer already cited, "exquisite satire." Among the severest of Messrs. Montague and Prior's strictures is a sarcastic reference to Reynard the fox. What was good enough for Dryden, for Goethe, and for Mr. Carlyle was childish rubbish to these brisk young critics. The story alluded to says that Dryden wept at the attack and complained that two young fellows to whom he had been civil should thus have treated an old man. Now Dryden certainly did not consider himself an old man at this time, and he had "seen many others," as an admirable Gallicism has it, in the matter of attacks.

One more poem, and one only, remains to be noticed in this division. This was the luckless *Britannia Rediviva*, written on the birth of the most ill-starred of all Princes of Wales, born in the purple. It is in couplets, and as no work of Dryden's written at this time could be worthless, it contains some vigorous verse, but on the whole it is by far the worst of his serious poems; and it was no misfortune for his fame that the Revolution left it out of print for the rest of the author's life.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE FROM 1680 TO 1688.

THAT portion of Dryden's life which extends from the Popish Plot to the Revolution is of so much more importance for the estimate of his personal character, as well as for that of his literary genius, than any other period of equal length, that it has seemed well to devote a separate chapter to the account and discussion of it. The question of Dryden's conversion, its motives and its sincerity, has of itself been more discussed than any other point in his life, and on the opinions to be formed of it must depend the opinion which, on the whole, we form of him as a man. According to one view his conduct during these years places him among the class which paradox delights to describe as the "greatest and meanest of mankind," the men who compensate for the admirable qualities of their heads by the despicable infirmities of their hearts. According to another, his conduct, if not altogether wise, contains nothing discreditable to him, and some things which may be reasonably described as very much the contrary. Twenty years of play-writing had, in all probability, somewhat disgusted Dryden with the stage, and his Rose-Alley misfortune had shown him that even a scrupulous abstinence from meddling in politics or in personal satire would not save him from awkward conse-

quences. His lucrative contract with the players had, beyond all doubt, ceased, and his official salaries, as we shall see, were paid with the usual irregularity. At the same time, as has been already pointed out, his turn of thought probably led him to take more interest in practical politics and in religious controversy than had been previously the case. The additional pension, which as we have seen he had received, made his nominal income sufficient, and instead of writing plays *invitâ Minervâ* he took to writing satires and argumentative pieces to please himself. Other crumbs of royal favour fell to his lot from time to time. The broad pieces received for the *Medal* are very probably apocryphal, but there is no doubt that his youngest son received, in February, 1683, a presentation to the Charterhouse from the king. This presentation it was which he was said to have received from Shaftesbury, as the price of the mitigating lines ("Yet fame deserved—easy of access") inserted in the later edition of *Absalom and Achitophel*. He was also indefatigable in undertaking and performing minor literary work of various kinds, which will be noticed later. Nor indeed could he afford to be idle; his pensions were often unpaid, and it is just after the great series of his satires closed that we get a glimpse of this fact. A letter is extant to Rochester—Hyde, not Wilmot—complaining of long arrears, and entreating some compensation in the shape of a place in the Customs, or the Excise, besides an instalment at least of the debt. It is this letter which contains the well-known phrase, "It is enough for one age to have neglected Mr. Cowley and starved Mr. Butler." As far as documentary evidence goes the answer to the appeal was a Treasury warrant for 75*l.*, the arrears being over 1000*l.*, and an appointment to a collectorship of Customs

in the port of London, with unknown emoluments. The only definite sum mentioned is a nominal one of 5*l.* a year as collector of duties on cloth. But it is not likely that cloth was the only subject of Dryden's labours, and in those days the system of fees and perquisites flourished. This Customs appointment was given in 1683.

To the condition of Dryden's sentiments in the last years of Charles' reign *Religio Laici* must be taken as the surest, and indeed as the only clue. There is no proof that this poem was composed to serve any political purpose, and indeed it could not have served any, neither James nor Charles being likely to be propitiated by a defence, however moderate and rationalizing, of the Church of England. It is not dedicated to any patron, and seems to have been an altogether spontaneous expression of what was passing in the poet's mind. A careful study of the poem, instead of furnishing arguments against the sincerity of his subsequent conduct, furnishes, I think, on the contrary, arguments which are very strongly in its favour. It could have, as has just been said, no purpose of pleasing a lay patron, for there was none to be pleased by it. It is not at all likely to have commended itself to a clerical patron, because of its rationalizing tone, its halting adoption of the Anglican Church as a kind of makeshift, and its heterodox yearnings after infallibility. These last indeed are among the most strongly-marked features of the piece, and point most clearly in the direction which the poet afterwards took.

> Such an omniscient church we wish indeed,
> 'Twere worth both Testaments, cast in the Creed,

is an awkward phrase for a sound divine, or a dutifully

acquiescing layman; but it is exactly the phrase which might be expected from a man who was on the slope from placid caring for none of these things to a more or less fervent condition of membership of an infallible church. The tenor of the whole poem, as it seems to me, is the same. The author, in his character of high Tory and orthodox Englishman, endeavours to stop himself at the point which the Anglican Church marks with a thus far and no farther; but, in a phrase which has no exact English equivalent, *nous le voyons venir*. It is quite evident that if he continues to feel anything like a lively interest in the problems at stake, he will go further still. He did go further, and has been accordingly railed against for many generations. But I do not hesitate to put the question to the present generation in a very concrete form. Is Dryden's critic nowadays prepared to question the sincerity of Cardinal Newman? If he is I have no objection to his questioning the sincerity of Dryden. But what is sauce for the nineteenth-century goose is surely sauce for the seventeenth-century gander. The post-conversion writings of the Cardinal are not less superficially inconsistent with the *Tracts for the Times* and the *Oxford Sermons*, than the *Hind and the Panther* is with *Religio Laici*.

A hyperbole has been in some sort necessary in order to rebut the very unjust aspersions which two of the most popular historians of the last thirty years have thrown on Dryden. But I need hardly say, that though the glory of Oxford in the first half of the nineteenth century is a fair argumentative parallel to the glory of Cambridge in the second half of the seventeenth, the comparison is not intended to be forced. I believe Dryden to have been, in the transactions of the years 1685-7, thoroughly sincere as far as

conscious sincerity went, but of a certain amount of unconscious insincerity I am by no means disposed to acquit him. If I judge his character aright, no English man of letters was ever more thoroughly susceptible to the spirit and influence of his time. Dryden was essentially a literary man, and was disposed rather to throw himself into the arms of any party than into those of one so hopelessly unliterary as the ultra-Liberal and ultra-Protestant party of the seventeenth century was. He was moreover a professed servant of the public, or as we should put it in these days, he had the journalist spirit. Fortunately—and it is for everybody who has to do with literature the most fortunate sign of the times—it is not now necessary for any one to do violence to a single opinion, even to a single crotchet of his own, in order to make his living by his pen. It was not so in Dryden's days, and it is fully believable that a sense that he was about to be on the winning side may have assisted his rapid determination from Hobbism or Halifaxism to Romanist orthodoxy. I am the more disposed to this allowance because it seems to me that Dryden's principal decrier was in need of a similar charity. Lord Macaulay is at present a glory of the Whigs. If there had been an equal opening when he was a young man for distinction and profit as a Tory, for early retirement on literary pursuits with a competence, and for all the other things which he most desired, is it quite so certain that he would not have been of the other persuasion? I have heard persons much more qualified than I am to decide on the characteristics of pure Liberalism energetically repudiate Macaulay's claim to be an apostle thereof. Yet I for my part have not the least idea of challenging his sincerity. It seems to me that he would have been at least wise if he had refrained,

considering the insufficiency of his knowledge, from challenging the sincerity of Dryden.

How insufficient the knowledge was the labours of subsequent investigators have sufficiently shown. Mr. Bell proved that the pension supposed to be conferred by James as a reward for Dryden's apostasy was simply a renewal of the pension granted by Charles years before; that it preceded instead of following the conversion, and that the sole reason of its having to be renewed at all was technical merely. As for the argument about Dryden's being previously indifferent to religion, and having written indecent plays, the arguer has himself demolished his argument in a famous passage about James's own morals, and the conduct of the non-resistance doctors of the Anglican Church. Burnet's exaggerated denunciations of Dryden as a "monster of impurity of all sorts," &c., are sufficiently traceable to Shadwell's shameless libels and to the Character of the Buzzard. It is true that the allegations of Malone and Scott, to the effect that Lady Elizabeth had been already converted, and Charles Dryden likewise, rest on a very slender foundation; but these are matters which have very little to do with the question in any case. The real problem can be very easily stated. Given a man to the general rectitude of whose private conduct all qualified witnesses testify, while it is only questioned by unscrupulous libellers—who gained, as can be proved, not one penny by his conversion, and though he subsequently lost heavily by it maintained it unswervingly—who can be shown, from the most unbiassed of his previous writings, to have been in exactly the state of mind which was likely to result in such a proceeding, and of whose insincerity there is no proof of the smallest value—what reason is there for suspecting him? The literary great-

ness of the man has nothing to do with the question. The fact is that he has been convicted, or rather sentenced, on evidence which would not suffice to convict Elkanah Settle or Samuel Pordage.

In particular we have a right to insist upon the absolute consistency of Dryden's subsequent conduct. Mr. Christie, who, admirably as for the most part he judges Dryden's literary work, was steeled against his personal character by the fact that Dryden attacked his idol Shaftesbury, thinks that a recantation would have done him no good had he tried it. The opinion is, to say the least, hasty. Had Dryden proffered the oaths to William and Mary, as poet-laureate and historiographer, it is very hard to see what power could have deprived him of his two hundred a year. The extra hundred of pension might have been forfeited, but the revenues of these places, and of that in the Customs must have been safe, unless the new Government chose to incur what it was of all things desirous to prevent, the charge of persecution and intolerance. When the Whigs were so desperately hard up for literary talent that Dorset, in presenting Shadwell for the laureateship, had to pay him the very left-handed compliment of saying, that if he was not the best poet he was at least the honestest—i. e. the most orthodoxly Whiggish—man, when hardly a single distinguished man of letters save Locke, who was nothing of a pamphleteer, was on their side, is it to be supposed for a moment that Dryden would not have been welcome? The argument against him recalls a curious and honourable story which Johnson tells of Smith, the Bohemian author of *Phædra and Hippolytus*. Addison, who, as all the world knows, was a friend of Smith's, and who was always ready to do his friends good turns, procured for Smith, from some Whig

magnates, a commission for a History of the Revolution. To the disgust of the mediator Smith demurred. "What," he said, "am I to do with the character of Lord Sunderland?" Addison is said to have replied, in deep but illogical wrath, "When were you drunk last?" I feel extremely inclined to put Smith's query to the persons who maintain that it would have been impossible for Dryden to turn his coat at the Revolution. What are they going to do with the character of Lord Sunderland? In the age not merely of Sunderland, but of Marlborough, of Godolphin, of Russell, of a hundred other treble-dyed traitors, it surely cannot be contended that the first living writer of English would have been rejected by those who had need of his services. Now, we know that so far from making any overtures of submission, Dryden was stiff in his Jacobitism and in his faith. Nothing in his life is more celebrated than his persistent refusal to give way to Tonson's entreaties to dedicate the Virgil to William, and his whole post-Revolution works may be searched in vain for a single stroke intended to curry favour with the powers that were. If, as he puts it in a letter still extant, they would take him on his literary merits, he would not refuse their offers, but as to yielding an inch of his principles, he would not. And his works amply justify the brave words. It is surely hard measure to go out of one's way to upbraid with wanton or venal apostasy one to whose sincerity there is such complete testimony, both *a priori* and *a posteriori*, as this.

Except the *Hind and the Panther* no work inspired by his new religious sentiments did Dryden much credit, or, it would appear, brought him much profit. James was not a particularly generous master, though it is probable that the laureate-historiographer-collector received his dues

much more punctually under his orderly administration than in the days of his spendthrift brother. The works upon which the court put Dryden were not very happily chosen, nor in all cases very happily executed. His defence of the reasons which had converted Anne Hyde, is about the worst of his prose works, and was handled (in the rough controversial fashion of the day) very damagingly by Stillingfleet. A translation of a work of Varillas' on ecclesiastical history was announced but never published, and considering the worthlessness of Varillas as a historian it is just as well. The *Life of St. Francis Xavier*, dedicated to the queen, was better worth doing, and was well done. It is curious that in this dedication occurs one of those confident anticipations of the birth of the young Pretender, which after the event were used by zealous Protestants as arguments for the spuriousness of the child. These and minor works show that Dryden, as indeed might be expected, was in favour at court, and was made use of by the economical and pious rulers of England. But of any particular benefit reaped by him from his conversion there is no hint whatever; in some respects, indeed, it did him harm. His two youngest sons, who had followed their father's change of faith, were elected about this time to scholarships at the universities, but were prevented, apparently by their religion, from going into residence.

The mere loss of education and prospects for his children was, however, a trifle to what Dryden had to undergo at the Revolution. It is probable that this event was almost as much a surprise to him as to James himself. But however severe the blow might be it was steadily borne. The period at which the oaths had to be taken to the new Government came, and Dryden did not take them. This

vacated at once his literary posts and his place in the Customs, if, as there seems every reason to believe, he held it up to the time. His position was now exceedingly serious. He was nearly sixty years of age. His patrimony was but small, and such addition to it as he had received with Lady Elizabeth did not exceed a few scores of pounds annually. He had three sons grown to man's estate, and all the more difficult to provide for that their religion incapacitated them from almost every profitable pursuit in their native country. He himself had long, save in one trifling instance, broken his relation with the stage, the most lucrative opening for literary work. He was a marked man, far more obnoxious personally to many of the ruling party than Milton had been thirty years before, when he thought it necessary to go into "abscondence." The very gains of the theatre were not what they had been, unless they were enhanced by assiduous visits to patrons and dedicatees, a degrading performance to which Dryden never would consent. Loss of fortune, of prospects, and of powerful friends was accompanied in Dryden's case by the most galling annoyances to his self-love. His successor in the laureateship was none other than Shadwell, whom he had so bitterly satirized, whom he had justly enough declared able to do anything but write, and who was certain to exult over him with all the triumph of a coarse and vindictive nature. Dryden, however, came out of the trial admirably. He had indeed some staunch friends in both political parties, the Dorsets and the Leveson-Gowers being as true to him as the Rochesters and the Ormonds. But his main resource now, as all through his life, was his incomparable literary faculty, his splendid capacity for work, and his dogged opposition to the assaults of fortune. In the twelve years of life

which remained to him he built up his fortune and maintained it anew, not merely by assiduous practice of those forms of literature in which he had already won renown, but by exercising yet again his marvellous talent for guessing the taste of the time, and striking out new lines to please it. Just as no one from *Annus Mirabilis* and *Aurengzebe* could have divined *Absalom and Achitophel* and the *Hind and the Panther*, so no one, except on the principle that all things were now possible to Dryden, could have divined from *Absalom and Achitophel* and the *Hind and the Panther*, either *Palamon and Arcite*, or the translation of Virgil.

Some minor works of Dryden's not mentioned in the last chapter, nor falling under the heads to be noticed in subsequent chapters, may here deserve notice. Some time or other in the reign of James the Second Dryden wrote to Etherege a poetical epistle, which is its author's only attempt in the easy octosyllabic verse, which Butler had just used with such brilliant success, and which Prior was in a more polished if less vigorous form to use with success almost equally brilliant a few years later. "Gentle George" Etherege deserved the compliments which Dryden paid him more than once, and it is only to be wished that the poet's communications with him, whether in verse or prose, had been more frequent. Had they been so we might have been able to solve what is now one of the most curious problems of English literary history. Though Etherege was a man of fashion, of literary importance, and of a distinguished position in diplomacy—he was English minister at Ratisbon, where Dryden addresses him—only the circumstances and not the date of his death are known. It is said that in seeing his friends downstairs he overbalanced himself and was taken up dead; but when this

happened no one seems to know.[1] A line in the epistle seems to show that Etherege had been obliged to take to heavy drinking as a compliment to his German friends, and thus indirectly prophesies the circumstances of his death. But the author of *Sir Fopling Flutter* and *She would if she could* hardly deserved such a hugger-mugger end.

To this time too belongs the first *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*. It is not a great production, and cannot pretend comparison with the second and more famous piece composed on a later occasion. But it is curious how many lines and phrases it has contributed to the list of stock quotations—especially curious when it is remembered that the whole piece is only sixty-three lines long. "A heap of jarring atoms," "the diapason closing full in man," "the double, double, double beat of the thundering drum," and several other phrases survive. The thing was set to music by an Italian composer named Draghi, and seems to have been popular. Besides these and other tasks Dryden began at this time a curious work or series of works, which was continued at intervals till his death, which was imitated afterwards by many others, and which in some sort was an ancestor of the modern literary magazine or review. This was the *Miscellany*, the first volume of which appeared in the beginning of 1684, and the second

[1] In reply to a request of mine, Mr. W. Noël Sainsbury has brought to my notice letters of Etherege in the Record Office and in the Reports of the Historical MSS. Commission. In January, 1688-9, Etherege wrote to Lord Preston from Ratisbon. The first letter from his successor is dated April, 1689. If then he died at Ratisbon this brings the date between narrow limits. There is, however, a rival legend that he followed James into exile. Since this note was written more letters have, I hear, been found in the British Museum, and Mr. Gorse has the whole subject under treatment.

in the beginning of 1685, though a considerable interval occurred before a third volume was brought out. These volumes contained both old and new poems, mostly of the occasional kind, by Dryden himself, besides many of his translations. But they were by no means limited to his own productions. Many other authors, old and new, were admitted, and to the second volume Charles Dryden, his eldest son, was a contributor. These two years (1684 and 1685), it will be observed, were not merely those in which, owing to the non-payment of his appointments, his pecuniary straits must have been considerable, but they were also years in which there was a kind of lull between the rapid series of his great satirical works and the collection of verse and prose productions which owe their birth to his conversion. It is somewhat remarkable that Dryden's abstinence from the stage during this time —which was broken only by the *Duke of Guise* and by the production of the rather unsuccessful opera, *Albion and Albanius*—seems to have been accompanied by a cessation also in his activity as a prologue writer. Both before and after this period prologue writing was a regular source of income and employment to him. There is a famous story of Southerne and Dryden which is often quoted, both for its intrinsic interest, and because the variety with which its circumstances are related is rather an instructive comment on the trustworthiness of such stories. Every one is supposed to know Pope's reference to the author of *Oroonoko* as—

> Tom whom heaven sent down to raise
> The price of prologues and of plays.

The story is that Southerne in 1782 applied to Dryden for a prologue (which is extant), and was told that the

tariff had gone up from two guineas to three. "Not out of any disrespect to you, young man, but the players have had my goods too cheap." The figures two and three are replaced in some versions by four and six, in others by five and ten. This story gives the date of 1682, and it is remarkable that until 1690, when Dryden once more came on the stage himself with a new play, his prologues and epilogues are very few. Possibly the increased price was prohibitive, but it is more likely that the political struggles of the time put all but political verse out of fashion. These compositions had always been famous, or rather infamous, for their licence of language, and the political excesses of some of Dryden's few utterances of the kind at this time are not creditable to his memory. Hallam's phrase of "virulent ribaldry" is absurd as applied to *Absalom and Achitophel*, or to the *Medal*. It is only too well in place as applied to the stuff put in the mouth of the actress who spoke the epilogue to the *Duke of Guise*. The truth is that if they be taken as a whole these prologues and epilogues could be better spared by lovers of Dryden from his works than any other section thereof; and it is particularly to be regretted that Mr. Christie, in his excellent Globe edition of the poems, has admitted them, while excluding the always melodious, and sometimes exquisitely poetical songs from the plays, which certainly do not exceed the prologues in licence of language, while their literary merit is incomparably greater.

CHAPTER VI.

LATER DRAMAS AND PROSE WORKS.

It might have seemed, at first sight, that the Revolution would be a fatal blow to Dryden. Being unwilling to take the oaths to the new Government, he lost at once the places and the pensions which, irregularly as they had been paid, had made up, since he ceased to write constantly for the stage, by far the greater part of his income. He was nearly sixty years old, his private fortune was, if not altogether insignificant, quite insufficient for his wants, and he had three sons to maintain and set out in the world. But he faced the ruin of his fortunes, and what must have been bitterer to him, the promotion of his enemies into his own place, with the steady courage and practical spirit of resource which were among his most creditable characteristics. Not all his friends deserted him, and from Dorset in particular he received great and apparently constant assistance. The story that this generous patron actually compensated Dryden by an annuity equal in value to his former appointments seems to rest on insufficient foundation. The story that when Dryden and Tom Brown dined with Dorset the one found a hundred-pound note and the other a fifty-pound note under his cover, does not do much credit to Dorset's powers of literary arithmetic,

nor, even allowing for the simpler manners of the time, to his delicacy of feeling. But Dryden's own words are explicit on the point of his having received assistance from this old friend, and it is said that in certain letters preserved at Knole, and not yet given to the world, there are still more definite acknowledgments. Dryden, however, was never disposed to depend on patrons, even though, like Corneille, he did not think it necessary to refuse their gifts when they presented themselves. Theatrical gains had, it has been said, decreased, unless dramatists took pains to increase them by dedication or by the growing practice of placing subscription copies among wealthy friends. Still, a hundred pounds could be depended upon from a good third night and from the bookseller's fee for the book, and a hundred pounds was a matter of considerable importance to Dryden just now. For full seven years he had all but abandoned dramatic composition. His contributions to Lee's *Duke of Guise*, which probably brought him no money, and certainly brought him a troublesome controversy, and the opera of *Albion and Albanius* had been his only attempts on the stage since the *Spanish Friar*. The *Duke of Guise*, though Dryden's part in it is of no little merit, hardly needs notice here, and *Albion and Albanius* was a failure. It was rather a masque than an opera, and depended, though there is some good verse in it, rather on elaborate and spiteful gibbeting of the enemies of the court than on poetical or dramatic merits. But Dryden's dramatic reputation was by no means impaired. The first play ordered to be performed by Queen Mary was the *Spanish Friar*, and this Protestant drama proved a most unfortunate one for her Majesty; for the audience at that time were extraordinarily quick to seize any kind of political allusion,

and, as it happened, there were in the *Spanish Friar* many allusions of an accidental but unmistakable kind to ungrateful children, banished monarchs, and so forth. The eyes of the whole audience were fixed on Mary, and she probably repented of her choice. But Dryden did not long depend on revivals of his old plays. The second year of the new régime saw the production of *Don Sebastian*, a tragi-comedy, one scene of which, that between Sebastian and Dorax, is famous in literature, and which as a whole is often ranked above all Dryden's other dramas, though for my own part I prefer *All for Love*. The play, though at first received with a certain lukewarmness, which may have been due to various causes, soon became very popular. It was dedicated to Lord Leicester, Algernon Sidney's eldest brother, a very old man, who was probably almost alone among his contemporaries (with the exception of Dryden himself) in being an ardent admirer of Chaucer. In the preface to the *Fables* the poet tells us that he had postponed his translation of the elder bard out of deference to Lord Leicester's strongly expressed opinion that the text should be left alone. In the same year was produced a play less original, but perhaps almost better, and certainly more popular. This was *Amphitryon*, which some critics have treated most mistakenly as a mere translation of Molière. The truth is that the three plays of Plautus, Molière, and Dryden are remarkable examples of the power which great writers have of treading in each other's steps without servile imitation. In a certain dry humour Dryden's play is inferior to Plautus, but, as compared with Molière, it has two features which are decided improvements—the introduction of the character of Judge Gripus and the separation of the part of the Soubrette into two. As *Don*

Sebastian had been dedicated to Lord Leicester, an old Cromwellian, so *Amphitryon* was dedicated to Sir William Leveson Gower, a prominent Williamite. Neither dedication contains the least truckling to the powers that were, but Dryden seems to have taken a pleasure in showing that men of both parties were sensible of his merit and of the hardship of his position. Besides these two plays an alteration of *The Prophetess* was produced in 1690, in which Dryden is said to have assisted Betterton. In 1691 appeared *King Arthur*, a masque-opera on the plan of *Albion and Albanius*. Unlike the latter, it has no political meaning; indeed, Dryden confesses to having made considerable alterations in it, in order to make it non-political. The former piece had been set by a Frenchman, Grabut, and the music had been little thought of. Purcell undertook the music for *King Arthur* with much better success. Allowing for a certain absurdity which always besets the musical drama, and which is particularly apparent in that of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, *King Arthur* is a very good piece; the character of Emmeline is attractive, the supernatural part is managed with a skill which would have been almost proof against the wits of the *Rehearsal*, and many of the lyrics are excellent. Dryden was less fortunate with his two remaining dramas. In writing the first he showed himself, for so old a craftsman and courtier, very unskilful in the choice of a subject. *Cleomenes*, the banished King of Sparta, could not but awaken the susceptibilities of zealous revolution censors. After some difficulties, in which Lawrence Hyde once more did Dryden a good turn, the piece was licensed, but it was not very successful. It contains some fine passages, but the most remarkable thing about it is that there is a considerable relapse into rhyme, which Dryden

had abandoned for many years. It contains, also, one of the last, not the least beautiful, and fortunately almost the most quotable of the exquisite lyrics which, while they prove perhaps more fully than anything else, Dryden's almost unrivalled command of versification, disprove at the same time his alleged incapacity to express true feeling. Here it is :—

No, no, poor suffering heart, no change endeavour,
Choose to sustain the smart, rather than leave her;
My ravished eyes behold such charms about her,
I can die with her, but not live without her;
One tender sigh of hers to see me languish,
Will more than pay the price of my past anguish:
Beware, O cruel fair, how you smile on me,
'Twas a kind look of yours, that has undone me.

Love has in store for me one happy minute,
And she will end my pain, who did begin it;
Then no day void of bliss, of pleasure, leaving,
Ages shall slide away without perceiving:
Cupid shall guard the door, the more to please us,
And keep out time and death, when they would seize us:
Time and death shall depart, and say in flying
Love has found out a way to live by dying.

Last of all the long list came *Love Triumphant*, a tragi-comedy, in 1694, which failed completely; why, it is not very easy to say. It is probable that these four plays and the opera did not by any means requite Dryden for his trouble in writing them. The average literary worth of them is, however, superior to that of his earlier dramas. The remarkable thing, indeed, about this portion of his work is not that it is not better, but that it is so good. He can scarcely be said to have had *la tête dramatique*, and yet in the *Conquest of Granada*, in *Marriage à la Mode*, in *Aurengzebe*, in *All*

[illegible] in the *Spanish Friar*, in *Don Sebastian*, and in *Amphitryon*, the principal plays which are certainly worthy of no other admiration. For the rest, save in isolated scenes and characters, little can be said, and even those few specimens have to be praised with not a little reserve.

Nevertheless, great as are the drawbacks of these plays, their position in the history of English dramatic literature is still a high and remarkable one. It was Dryden who, if he for the moment headed the desertion of the purely English style of drama, rehabilitated it and finally ordered and hallowed the return to a saner tradition. Even in his period of aberration he produced on his faulty plan such work as few other men have produced on the best plans yet elaborated. The reader who, ignorant of the English heroic play, goes to Dryden for information about it, may be surprised and shocked at its inferiority to the drama of the great masters. But he who goes to it knowing the contemporary work of Davenant and Boyle, of Howard and Settle, will rather wonder at the unmatched literary faculty which from such data could evolve such a result. The one play in which he gave himself the reins remains, as far as it appears to me, the only play, with the exception of *Venice Preserved*, which was written so as to be thoroughly worth reading now for 150, I had almost said for 200 years. The *Mourning Bride* and the *Fair Penitent* are worthless by the side of it, and to them may be added at one sweep every tragedy written during the whole eighteenth century. Since the beginning of the nineteenth we have indeed improved the poetical standard of this most difficult not to say hopeless form of composition; but at the same time we have in general lowered the dramatic standard. Half the best plays

written since the year 1800 have been avowedly written with hardly a thought of being acted; I should be sorry to say how many of the other half have either failed to be acted at all, or having been acted have proved dead failures. Now Dryden did so far manage to conciliate the gifts of the play-wright and the poet, that he produced work which was good poetry and good acting material. It is idle to dispute the deserts of his success, the fact remains.

Most, however, of his numerous hostile critics would confess and avoid the tragedies, and would concentrate their attention on the comedies. It is impossible to help, in part, imitating and transferring their tactics. No apology for the offensive characteristics of these productions is possible, and, if it were possible, I for one have no care to attempt it. The coarseness of Dryden's plays is unpardonable. It does not come under any of the numerous categories of excuse which can be devised for other offenders in the same kind. It is deliberate, it is unnecessary, it is a positive defect in art. When the culprit in his otherwise dignified and not unsuccessful *confiteor* to Collier, endeavours to shield himself by the example of the elder dramatists, the shield is seen at once, and what is more we know that he must have seen it himself, to be a mere shield of paper. But in truth the heaviest punishment that Dryden could possibly have suffered, the punishment which Diderot has indicated as inevitably imminent on this particular offence, has come upon him. The fouler parts of his work have simply ceased to be read, and his most thorough defenders can only read them for the purpose of appreciation and defence at the price of being queasy and qualmish. He has exposed his legs to the arrows of any criticaster who chooses

to aim at him, and the criticasters have not failed to jump at the chance of so noble a quarry. Yet I, for my part, shall still maintain that the merits of Dryden's comedies are by no means inconsiderable; indeed, that when Shakespeare, and Jonson, and Fletcher, and Etherege, and Wycherley, and Congreve, and Vanbrugh, and Sheridan have been put aside, he has few superiors. The unfailing thoroughness with which he did every description of literary work has accompanied him even here, where he worked according to his own confession against the grain, and where he was less gifted by nature than scores of other facile workers who could be named. The one situation which he could manage has been already indicated, and it is surely not a thing to be wholly neglected that his handlings of this situation undoubtedly preceded and probably suggested the crowning triumph of English comedy, the sublime apotheosis of the coquette in Millamant. To produce that triumph Dryden himself was indeed unable. But from sheer literary skill (the dominant faculty in him) he produced in Doralice, and in Melantha, and in Florimel, something not wholly unlike it. So, too, in the central figure of the *Spanish Friar* he achieved in the same way, by sheer literary faculty and by the skilful manipulation of his predecessors, something like an independent and an original creation. The one disqualification under which Dryden laboured, the disqualification to create a character, would have been in any lesser man a hopeless bar even to the most moderate dramatic success. But the superhuman degree in which he possessed the other and strictly literary gift of adoption and arrangement, almost supplied the place of what was wanting, and almost made him the equal of the more facile makers. So close was his study, so untiring his experiments, so sure his com-

mand, by dint of practice, of language, and metre, and situation that he could, like the magicians of Egypt, make serpents almost like, or quite like those of the true dramatic Moses. Shakespeare's serpents have eaten his up in time, and the retribution is just, but the credit of the original feat is hardly the less for that. In short all, or almost all, Dryden's dramatic work is a *tour de force*, but then it is such a *tour de force* as the world has hardly elsewhere seen. He was "bade to toil on to make them sport," and he obeyed the bidding with perhaps less reluctance than he should have shown. But he managed, as genius always does manage, to turn the hack-work into a possession for ever here and there. Unluckily it was only here and there, and no more can be claimed for it by any rational critic.

The subject of Dryden's prose work is intimately connected with that of his dramatic performances. Had it not been for the interest he felt in matters dramatic, he might never have ventured into anything longer than a preface; and his prefaces would certainly have lacked the remarkable interest in the history of style and in the history of criticism which they now possess. At the time when he first began to write, the accepted prose style of English was in much greater need of reform and reinforcement than the accepted poetical style; or, to speak more properly, there was no accepted prose style at all. Great masters—Bacon, Hooker, Clarendon, Milton, Taylor, Hobbes, Bunyan, and some others—may be quoted from the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century; but their excellences, like the excellences of the writers of French prose somewhat earlier, were almost wholly individual, and provided in no way a model whereby the average writer might form himself for average purposes. Now, prose is

much indebtedness on the part of the poet. The sometime archbishop's sermons are excellent in their combination of simplicity with a certain grace, but they are much less remarkable than Dryden's own work for the union of the two. The great fault of the elders had been, first, the inordinate length of their sentences; secondly—and this was rather a cause of the first fault than an additional error—their indulgence in parenthetic quotations, borrowed arguments, and other strengtheners of the position of the man who has to rely on authority; thirdly, the danger to which they were always exposed, of slipping into clumsy classicisms on one side, or inelegant vernacular on the other. Dryden avoided all these faults, though his avoidance was not a matter of a day or a year, nor was it, as far as can be made out, altogether an avoidance of malice prepense. Accident favoured him in exactly the reverse way to that in which it had favoured the reformer of French prose half a century or so before. Balzac had nothing to say, and therefore was extremely careful and exquisite in his manner of saying it. Dryden had a great deal to say, and said it in the plain, straightforward fashion which was of all things most likely to be useful for the formation of a workman-like prose style in English.

The influences of the post-Restoration period which, by their working, produced the splendid variety and efficiency of prose in the eighteenth century—the century, *par excellence*, of prose in English—were naturally numerous; but there were four which had an influence far surpassing that of the rest. These four were the influences of the pulpit, of political discussion, of miscellaneous writing—partly fictitious, partly discursive—and lastly, of literary criticism. In this last Dryden himself was the great authority of the period, and for many years it was in this

form that he at once exercised himself and educated his age in the matter of prose writing. Accident, and the circumstances of the time, helped to give him a considerable audience and an influence of great width, the critical spirit being extensively diffused at the time. This critical spirit was to a great extent a reflection of that which, beginning with Malherbe and continuing with the institution and regulation of the Academy, had for some time been remarkable in France. Not long after the Restoration one of the subtlest and most accomplished of all French critics took up his residence in England, and gave further impulse to the fashion which Charles himself and many other cavaliers had already picked up. Saint Evremond lived in England for some forty years, and during the greater part of that time was an oracle of the younger men of wit and pleasure about London. Now Saint Evremond was a remarkable instance of that rare animal, the born critic; even now-a days his critical dicta are worthy of all attention. He had a kind of critical intuition, which is to be paralleled only by the historical and scientific intuition which some of the greatest historians and men of science have had. With national and characteristic indolence he never gave himself the trouble to learn English properly, and it is doubtful whether he could have read a single English play. Yet his critical remarks on some English poets, not borrowed from his friends, but constructed from their remarks, as a clever counsel would construct a pleading out of the information furnished him, are extraordinarily acute and accurate. The relish for literary discussion which Saint Evremond shows was no peculiarity of his, though he had it in super-eminent measure. It was fashionable in France, and he helped to make it fashionable in England.

I have seen this style of criticism dismissed contemptuously as "trifling;" but this is only an instance of the strange power of reaction. Because for many years the plan of criticising by rule and line was almost exclusively pursued, and, as happens in the case of almost all exclusive pursuits, was followed too far, it seems to some people now-a-days, that criticism ought to be confined to the expression in more or less elegant language of the feelings of admiration or dislike which the subject criticised may excite in the critic's mind. The critic ought to give this impression, but he ought not to leave the other task unattempted, and the result of leaving it unattempted is to be found in the loose and haphazard judgments which now too often compose what is called criticism. The criticism of the Gallic School, which Dryden and Saint Evremond helped so much to naturalize in England, was at least not afraid of giving a reason for the faith that was in it. The critics strove to examine the abstract value of this or that literary form, the propriety of this or that mode of expression, the limits to be imposed on the choice and disposition of this or that subject. No doubt this often resulted in looking merely at the stopwatch, as Sterne's famous phrase has it. But it often resulted in something better, and it at least produced something like reasonable uniformity of judgment.

Dryden's criticisms took, as a rule, the form of prefaces to his plays, and the reading of the play ensured, to some considerable extent, the reading of the preface. Probably the pattern may be found in Corneille's *Examens*. Nor must it be forgotten that the questions attacked in these disquisitions were of real interest at the time to a large number of persons; to a very much larger number relatively, perhaps even to a much larger number absolutely,

than would now be the case. The first instance of a considerable piece of prose written by Dryden was not indeed a preface, though it was of the nature of one. The *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* was written, according to its own showing, in the summer of 1665, and published two or three years later. It takes the form of a dialogue between interlocutors, who are sufficiently identified with Dorset, Sedley, Sir Robert Howard, and Dryden himself. The argument turns on various questions of comparison between classical French and English dramas, and especially between English dramas of the old and of the newer type, the latter of which Dryden defends. It is noticeable, however, that this very essay contained one of the best worded and best thought out of the author's many panegyrics upon Shakespeare. Viewed simply from the point of view of style this performance exhibits Dryden as already a considerable master of prose, though, so far as we know, he had had no practice in it beyond a few Prefaces and Dedications, if we except the unacknowledged hackwork which he is sometimes said to have performed for the bookseller Herringman. There is still something of the older, lengthy sentence, and of the tendency to elongate it by joint on joint as fresh thoughts recur to the writer. But these elongations rarely sacrifice clearness, and there is an almost total absence on the one hand of the cumbrous classical constructions of the elders; on the other, of the quaint colloquialisms which generally make their appearance when this more ambitious style is discarded. The Essay was quickly followed by a kind of reply from Sir Robert Howard, and Dryden made a somewhat sharp rejoinder to his brother-in-law in the defence of the Essay which he prefixed to his play of *The Indian Emperor*. He was evidently very angry with

Sir Robert, who had indeed somewhat justified Shadwell's caricature of him as "Sir Positive At-All," and this anger is not without effects on the style of the defence. Its sentences are sharper, shorter, more briskly and flippantly moulded than those of the Essay. Indeed, about this time, the time of his greatest prosperity, Dryden seems to have passed, somewhat late in life, through a period of flippancy. He was, for a few years, decidedly prosperous, and his familiarity with men of rank and position seems a little to have turned his head. It was at this time, and at this time only, that he spoke disrespectfully of his great predecessors, and insinuated, in a manner which I fear must be called snobbish, that his own familiarity with such models of taste and deportment as Rochester, put him in a very superior position for the drawing of character, to such humble and home-keeping folks as the old dramatists. These prefaces and dedications, however, even where their matter is scarcely satisfactory, show an ever-growing command of prose style, and, very soon, the resipiscence of Dryden's judgment and the result of his recently renewed study of the older writers. The Preface to *All for Love*, though short and more familiar in style than the earlier work is of excellent quality, and the same may be said of those to *Troïlus and Cressida* and the *Spanish Friar*, the latter of which is especially characteristic, and contains some striking remarks on the old dramatists. The great poetical works of the period between 1680 and 1687 are also attended by prose introductions, and some of these are exceedingly well done. The *Epistle to the Whigs*, which forms the preface to the *Medal*, is a piece of political writing such as there had been hitherto but very little in English, and it was admirably followed up by the *Vindication of the Duke of Guise*. On the other hand, the

preface to *Religio Laici*, though partly also polemical, is a model of what may be called the expository style. Dryden obtained no great credit for his controversy with Stillingfleet, his *Life of St. Francis Xavier*, or his *History of the League*, all of which were directly or indirectly controversial, and concerned with the political events of the time. As his lengthiest prose works, however, they can hardly be passed over without notice.

The Revolution, in throwing Dryden back upon purely literary pursuits, did him no more harm in the way of prose than of poetical composition. Not a few of his Translations have prose prefaces of peculiar excellence prefixed. The sketch of Satire which forms the preface to the *Juvenal*, is one of the best of its author's performances. The *Æneid* is introduced by an admirable dedication to Mulgrave; but the essay on the *Georgics*, though it is not indeed Dryden's own, is almost more interesting in this connexion than if it were—for this essay came from the pen of no less a person than Addison, then a young man of five-and-twenty, and it enables us to judge of the indebtedness of the Queen Anne men to Dryden in prose as well as in poetry. It would be a keen critic who, knowing Addison only from the *Spectator*, could detect his hand in this performance. But it does not require much keenness in any one who knows Dryden's prose and Addison's, to trace the link of connexion which this piece affords. It lies much nearer to the former than the latter, and it shows clearly how the writer must have studied those "prefaces of Dryden" which Swift chose to sneer at. As in poetry, however, so in prose, Dryden's best, or almost his best work, was his last. The dedication of the *Fables* to the Duke of Ormond is the last and the most splendid of his many pieces of polished flattery. The preface which follows

it is the last, and one of the best examples of his literary criticism.

It has been justly observed of Dryden's prose style that it is, for the style of so distinguished a writer, singularly destitute of mannerism. If we father any particular piece upon him without knowing it to be his, it is not, as in the case of most writers, because of some obvious trick of arrangement or phraseology. The truth is, or at least the probability, that Dryden had no thought of inventing or practising a definite prose style, though he had more than once a very definite intention in his practice of matters poetical. Poetry was with him, as indeed it should be, an end in itself; prose, as perhaps it should also be for the most part, only a means to an end. He wanted from time to time to express his ideas on certain points that interested him; to answer accusations which he thought unjust; to propitiate powerful patrons; sometimes, perhaps, merely to discharge commissions with which he had been intrusted. He found no good instrument ready to his hand for these purposes, and so, with that union of the practical and literary spirit which distinguished him so strongly, he set to work to make one. But he had no special predilection for the instrument, except in so far as it served its turn, and he had therefore no object in preserving any special peculiarities in it except for the same reason. His poetical and dramatic practice, and the studies which that practice implied, provided him with an ample vocabulary, a strong, terse method of expression, and a dislike to archaism, vulgarity, or want of clearness. He therefore let his words arrange themselves pretty much as they would, and probably saw no object in such devices as the balancing of one part of a sentence by another, which attracted so many of his

successors. The long sentence with its involved clauses was contrary to his habit of thought, and would have interfered with his chief objects—clearness and precision. Therefore he, in the main, discarded it, yet if at any time a long and somewhat complicated sentence seemed to him to be appropriate he did not hesitate to write one. Slip-shod diction and cant vulgarities revolted his notions of correctness and elegance, and therefore he seldom uses them; yet there are not very many writers in whom colloquialisms occasionally occur with happier effect. If a fault is to be found with his style it probably lies in a certain abuse of figures and of quotation, for both of which his strong tincture of the characteristics of the first half of the century may be responsible, while the former at least is natural to a poet. Yet on the whole his style, if compared either with Hooker and Clarendon, Bacon and Milton on the one hand, or with Addison, and still more the later eighteenth century writers on the other, is a distinctly plain and homely style. It is not so vernacular as Bunyan or Defoe, and not quite so perfect in simplicity as Swift. Yet with the work of these three writers it stands at the head of the plainer English prose styles, possessing at the same time a capacity of magnificence to which the others cannot pretend. As there is no original narrative of any length from Dryden's hand in prose, it is difficult to say whether he could have discharged satisfactorily this part of the prose-writer's functions. The *Life of Xavier* is good, but not of the best. For almost any other function, however, the style seems to be well adapted.

Now this, it must be remembered, was the great want of the day in matter of prose style—a style, namely, that should be generally flexible and capable of adaptation, not merely to the purposes of the erudite and ambitious,

but to any purpose for which it might be required, and in which the vernacular and the literary elements should be properly blended and adjusted. It is scarcely too much to say that if, as some critics have inclined to think, the influence of Dryden tended to narrow the sphere and cramp the efforts of English poetry, it tended equally to enlarge the sphere and develope the energies of English prose. It has often been noticed that poets, when they have any faculty for prose writing, are among the best of prose writers, and of no one is this more true than it is of Dryden.

Set prose passages of laboured excellence are not very common with Dryden. But the two following, the first being the famous character of Shakespeare from the *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, the second an extract from the preface to the *Fables*, will give some idea of his style at periods separated by more than thirty years. The one was his first work of finished prose, the other his last: —

As Neander was beginning to examine "The Silent Woman," Eugenius, earnestly regarding him; I beseech you, Neander, said he, gratify the company, and me in particular, so far, as before you speak of the play, to give us a character of the author; and tell us frankly your opinion, whether you do not think all writers, both French and English, ought to give place to him. I fear, replied Neander, that in obeying your commands I shall draw some envy on myself. Besides, in performing them, it will be first necessary to speak somewhat of Shakespeare and Fletcher, his rivals in poesy; and one of them, in my opinion, at least his equal, perhaps his superior. To begin then with Shakespeare. He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him

the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comick wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

The consideration of this made Mr. Hales of Eton say, that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ but he would produce it much better done in Shakespeare; and however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him, Fletcher and Jonson, never equalled them to him in their esteem: and in the last king's court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakespeare far above him.

As for the religion of our poet,[1] he seems to have some little bias towards the opinions of Wickliffe, after John of Gaunt, his patron; somewhat of which appears in the "Tale of Pierce Plowman," yet I cannot blame him for inveighing so sharply against the vices of the clergy in his age: their pride, their ambition, their pomp, their avarice, their worldly interest, deserved the lashes which he gave them, both in that, and in most of his Canterbury Tales. Neither has his contemporary, Boccace, spared them. Yet both those poets lived in much esteem with good and holy men in orders; for the scandal which is given by particular priests, reflects not on the sacred function. Chaucer's Monk, his Canon, and his Friar, took not from the character of his Good Parson. A satirical poet is the check of the laymen on bad priests. We are only to take care

[1] Chaucer.

that we involve not the innocent with the guilty in the same condemnation. The good cannot be too much honoured, nor the bad too coarsely used; for the corruption of the best becomes the worst. When a clergyman is whipped, his gown is first taken off, by which the dignity of his order is secured. If he be wrongfully accused, he has his action of slander; and it is at the poet's peril, if he transgress the law. But they will tell us, that all kind of satire, though never so well deserved by particular priests, yet brings the whole order into contempt. Is then the peerage of England anything dishonoured, when a peer suffers for his treason? If he be libelled, or any way defamed, he has his scandalum magnatum to punish the offender. They who use this kind of argument, seem to be conscious to themselves of somewhat which has deserved the poet's lash, and are less concerned for their publick capacity, than for their private; at least there is pride at the bottom of their reasoning. If the faults of men in orders are only to be judged among themselves, they are all in some sort parties; for, since they say the honour of their order is concerned in every member of it, how can we be sure that they will be impartial judges? How far I may be allowed to speak my opinion in this case, I know not; but I am sure a dispute of this nature caused mischief in abundance betwixt a King of England and an Archbishop of Canterbury; one standing up for the laws of his land, and the other for the honour (as he called it) of God's church; which ended in the murder of the Prelate, and in the whipping of his Majesty from post to pillar for his penance. The learned and ingenious Dr. Drake has saved me the labour of enquiring into the esteem and reverence which the priests have had of old; and I would rather extend than diminish any part of it: yet I must needs say, that when a priest provokes me without any occasion given him, I have no reason, unless it be the charity of a Christian, to forgive him: *prior læsit* is justification sufficient in the civil law. If I answer him in his own language, self-defence, I am sure, must be allowed me; and if I carry it farther, even to a sharp recrimination, somewhat may be indulged to human frailty. Yet my resentment has not wrought so far, but that I have

followed Chaucer in his character of a holy man, and have enlarged on that subject with some pleasure; reserving to myself the right, if I shall think fit hereafter, to describe another sort of priests, such as are more easily to be found than the Good Parson; such as have given the last blow to Christianity in this age, by a practice so contrary to their doctrine. But this will keep cold till another time. In the mean while I take up Chaucer where I left him.

These must suffice for examples of the matter as well as of the manner of the literary criticism which forms the chief and certainly the most valuable part of Dryden's prose works. The great value of that criticism consists in its extremely appreciative character, and in its constant connexion with the poet's own constructive work. There is much in it which might seem to expose Dryden to the charge of inconsistency. But the truth is, that his literary opinions were in a perpetual state of progress, and therefore of apparent flux. Sometimes he wrote with defective knowledge, sometimes, though not often, without thinking the subject out, sometimes (and this very often) with a certain one-sidedness of view having reference rather to the bearing of the point on experiments he was then trying or about to try, than to any more abstract considerations He never aimed at paradox for its own sake, but he never shrank from it; and on the whole his criticisms, though perhaps nowadays they appeal rather to the expert and the student than to the general reader, are at least as interesting for their matter as for their form. The importance of the study of that form in the cultivation of a robust English style has never been denied.

CHAPTER VII.

PERIOD OF TRANSLATION.

It is in many cases a decidedly difficult problem to settle the exact influence which any writer's life and circumstances have upon his literary performances and career. Although there are probably few natures so absolutely self-sufficing and so imperial in their individuality that they take no imprint from the form and pressure of the time, the exact force which that pressure exercises is nearly always very hard to calculate. In the case of Dryden, however, the difficulty is fortunately minimized. There was never, it may safely be said, so great a writer who was so thoroughly occasional in the character of his greatness. The one thing which to all appearance he could not do, was to originate a theme. His second best play, according to the general judgment, his best as I venture to think, is built, with an audacity to which only great genius or great folly could lead, on the lines of Shakespeare. His longest and most ambitious poem follows with a surprising faithfulness the lines of Chaucer. His most effective piece of tragic description is a versified paraphrase —the most magnificent paraphrase perhaps ever written —of the prose of Boccaccio. Even in his splendid satires he is rarely successful, unless he has what is called in modern literary slang a very definite "peg" given him to

hang his verse upon. *Absalom and Achitophel* is little more than a loosely connected string of characters, each owing no doubt something, and what is more, a great deal to the poet, but originally given to, and not invented by him. No fashion of poetry can be farther aloof from Dryden's than that which, as in the case of Shelley, spins great poems purely out of its own brain. His strong and powerful mind could grind the corn supplied to it into the finest flour, but the corn must always be supplied. The exquisite perfection of his smaller lyrics forbids us to set this down as in any sense a drawback. It was rather a strong inclination to the one office than an incapacity for the other. What is more to the purpose, this peculiarity is very closely connected with Dryden's fitness for the position which he held. The man who is to control the peaceable revolution of a literature, who is to shape a language to new uses, and help writers for a century after his death to vocabulary, rhythm, and style, in prose as well as in verse, is perhaps all the better off for not being too spontaneous or original in his choice of subjects. But however this may be, there is no doubt that outward circumstances always had a great, and the greatest influence upon the development of Dryden's genius. There was in some respects a quality about this genius for which it would be hard to find an appropriate name. To call such a mind and such a talent as Dryden's parasitic would be ridiculous. Yet in any lesser man the same characteristics would undoubtedly receive that appellation. It seems always to have been, if not necessary, at any rate satisfactory to him, to follow some lines which had been already laid down, to accept a departure from some previous work, to match himself closely with some existing performance. It appears almost as if, in his ex-

traordinary care for the manner of his poetical work, he felt it an advantage to be relieved of much trouble about the matter. The accusations of plagiarism which his frantic enemies constantly brought against him were, in any discreditable sense, as idle as accusations of plagiarism usually are; but they had considerably more foundation in literal fact than is usual with such accusations. He had a habit of catching up phrases sometimes from the works of men to whom he was anything but complimentary, and inserting them, much improved it is true for the most part, in his own work. I have come across a curious instance of this, which I do not remember to have seen anywhere noticed. One of the most mortifying incidents in Dryden's literary career was the already mentioned composition by his rival, though not exactly enemy, Crowne, of the Masque of *Calisto*. There seems to be little doubt, though the evidence is not entirely conclusive, that Crowne's share in this work was due to Rochester, who afterwards made himself obnoxious to Dryden's wrath in a still more unpardonable manner. Under these circumstances we certainly should not expect to find Dryden borrowing from *Calisto*. Yet a whole line in *Macflecknoe*, "The fair Augusta much to fears inclined," is taken, with the addition of the adjective and the adverb, from a song of Crowne's: "Augusta is to fears inclined." This temperament made the work of translation one peculiarly suitable to Dryden. He had, as early as 1684, included several translations in his first volume of Miscellanies, and he soon perceived that there was plenty of demand for more of the same ware. Except his great editor, it is doubtful whether any man of letters ever knew the public taste better than Dryden. The call for translations of the ancients was quite natural and

intelligible. Direct classical study was considerably on the wane. So far indeed as one sex was concerned, it had practically gone out of fashion altogether, and women of the accomplishments of Lady Jane Grey or Queen Elizabeth were now thought monsters. Even as regards men, a much smaller proportion of the upper classes were able to read the classics in the original than had once been the case. Business, court life, employment in a standing army and navy, and many other distractions called men early away from their studies. Yet the interest felt, or supposed to be felt in classical literature, was at least as great as ever. The classics were still considered as literary models and patterns; and the famous controversy between the ancients and the moderns which arose about this time, helped to inspire a desire for some acquaintance with the former in the easy fashionable verse which Dryden had himself created. In 1693 he gave to the world the whole of Persius and much of Juvenal, the latter being completed by his sons and some friends. In the same year some more versions of Ovid and a little of Homer appeared; and in 1693 also his greatest work of translation, the Virgil, was begun. This was the only one of Dryden's works for which he received not wholly inadequate remuneration, and this remuneration was attained chiefly by the method of subscription. Besides these authors, his translations include extracts from Theocritus and Lucretius, a very few Odes of Horace, and a considerable portion of the Metamorphoses of Ovid, which appeared last of all in the well-known volume of *Fables*. The merits and peculiarities of Dryden's translation are easily estimated. It has been excellently remarked in the Preface of a recent prose translation of the Odyssey, that there can be no final translation of Homer, because the taste and literary

habits of each age demand different qualities in poetry. There is no need to limit this remark to Homer, or indeed to poetry. The work of the translator is to bridge over the interval between his author and his public, and therefore the construction and character of the bridge must necessarily differ, according to the instruction and demands of the public. Dryden could not give exact accuracy, though he was by no means such a bad scholar as Pope. But his public did not want exact accuracy, and would not have been grateful for it. He did not—whether he was or was not able—give them classical flavour and local colour, but for these they would have been still less grateful. What they wanted, and what he could give them as no other man then living could, was the matter of the original, tolerably unadulterated, and dressed up in the splendid diction and nervous verse which he had himself taught them to love. The parallel between the characteristics of the translation and the simple device whereby Jacob Tonson strove to propitiate the ruling powers in the illustrations to the *Virgil* is indeed obvious enough. Those illustrations displayed "old Nassau's hook-nosed head on pious Æneas' shoulders." The text itself displayed the head of Dryden on the shoulders of Virgil.

Even before the Miscellany of 1684, translations from Dryden's hands had been published. There appeared in 1680 a version of Ovid's *Heroides*, to which he gave a preface and a translation of two epistles, besides collaborating with Mulgrave in a third. The preface contains some good criticism of Ovid, and a defence of the manner of translation which with little change Dryden himself constantly employed. This he defines as being equally remote from verbal fidelity and from mere imitation. He

also lays down a canon as to the necessary equipment of a translator, which, if it could be despotically enforced, would be a remarkable boon to reviewers. "No man is capable of translating poetry, who, besides a genius to that art, is not a master both of his author's language and of his own. Nor must we understand the language only of the poet, but his particular turn of thoughts and expressions, which are the characters that distinguish, and as it were individuate him from all other writers." These first translations are interesting because they are the first, and for the sake of contrast with the later and more perfect work of the same kind. In some respects Ovid was an unfortunate author for Dryden to select, because his peculiarities tempted a relapse into the faults of the heroic-play style. But, on the other hand, Dryden's practice in the heroic play fitted him very well to translate Ovid. A few lines from the close of *Canace to Macareus* may be given as an instance,—

> And now appeared the messenger of death;
> Sad were his looks, and scarce he drew his breath,
> To say, "Your father sends you" (with that word
> His trembling hands presented me a sword;)
> "Your father sends you this; and lets you know,
> That your own crimes the use of it will show."
> Too well I know the sense those words impart;
> His present shall be treasured in my heart.
> Are these the nuptial gifts a bride receives?
> And this the fatal dower a father gives?
> Thou God of marriage, shun thy own disgrace,
> And take thy torch from this detested place!
> Instead of that, let furies light their brands,
> And fire my pile with their infernal hands!
> With happier fortune may my sisters wed,
> Warned by the dire example of the dead.
> For thee, poor babe, what crime could they pretend?
> How could thy infant innocence offend?

A guilt there was; but, oh, that guilt was mine!
Thou suffer'st for a sin that was not thine.
Thy mother's grief and crime! but just enjoyed,
Shewn to my sight, and born to be destroyed!
Unhappy offspring of my teeming womb!
Dragged headlong from thy cradle to thy tomb!
Thy unoffending life I could not save,
Nor weeping could I follow to thy grave;
Nor on thy tomb could offer my shorn hair,
Nor shew the grief which tender mothers bear.
Yet long thou shalt not from my arms be lost;
For soon I will o'ertake thy infant ghost.
But thou, my love, and now my love's despair,
Perform his funerals with paternal care;
His scattered limbs with my dead body burn,
And once more join us in the pious urn.
If on my wounded breast thou droppest a tear,
Think for whose sake my breast that wound did bear;
And faithfully my last desires fulfil,
As I perform my cruel father's will.

The Miscellanies of 1684 and 1685 contained a considerable number of translations from many different authors, and those of 1693 and 1694 added yet more. Altogether, besides Ovid and Virgil, specimens of Horace, Homer, Theocritus, and Lucretius are in these translations, while the more ambitious and complete versions of Juvenal and Virgil swell the total (in Scott's edition) to four volumes, containing perhaps some 30,000 lines.

It could hardly be expected that in translating authors of such different characters, and requiring in a poetical translator so many different gifts, Dryden should be altogether and equally successful. The *Juvenal* and the *Virgil* deserve separate notice; the others may be briefly reviewed. All of them are, according to the general conception of translation which Dryden had formed, decidedly loose, and by no means adhere to the original.

Indeed, Dryden not unfrequently inserts whole lines and passages of his own, a proceeding scarcely to be reconciled with the just-mentioned conception. On the whole he is perhaps most successful with Ovid. The versions of Horace are few, and by no means excessively Horatian, but they are almost all good poems in Dryden's stateliest rhythm. The version into a kind of Pindaric of the twenty-ninth ode of the third book is particularly good, and contains the well-known paraphrase of *resigno quæ dedit* ("I puff the prostitute away"), which was such a favourite with Thackeray that he puts it into the mouth, if I remember rightly, of more than one of his characters. Indeed, the three last stanzas of this are well worth quotation,—

VIII.

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He, who can call to-day his own;
He who, secure within, can say,
To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day;
Be fair, or foul, or rain, or shine,
The joys I have possessed, in spite of fate, are mine;
Not heaven itself upon the past has power,
But what has been, has been, and I have had my hour.

IX.

Fortune, that with malicious joy
  Does man, her slave, oppress,
Proud of her office to destroy,
  Is seldom pleased to bless:
Still various and unconstant still,
But with an inclination to be ill,
Promotes, degrades, delights in strife,
And makes a lottery of life.
I can enjoy her while she's kind;
But when she dances in the wind,
And shakes the wings and will not stay,

I puff the prostitute away:
The little or the much she gave, is quietly resigned;
Content with poverty, my soul I arm,
And virtue, though in rags, will keep me warm.

X.

What is't to me,
Who never sail in her unfaithful sea,
If storms arise and clouds grow black,
If the mast split, and threaten wreck?
Then let the greedy merchant fear
For his ill-gotten gain;
And pray to gods that will not hear,
While the debating winds and billows bear
His wealth into the main.
For me, secure from fortune's blows,
Secure of what I cannot lose,
In my small pinnace I can sail,
Contemning all the blustering roar;
And running with a merry gale,
With friendly stars my safety seek,
Within some little winding creek,
And see the storm ashore.

Least successful of all perhaps are the Theocritean translations. The idyllic spirit was not one of the many which would come at Dryden's call, and certain peculiarities of Theocritus, harmless enough in the original, are accentuated and magnified in the copy in a manner by no means pleasant. A thing more unfortunate still was the selection made from Lucretius. No one was ever better qualified to translate the greatest of Roman poets than Dryden; and had he given us the whole, it would probably have been the best verse translation in the language. As it is, he has done few things better than the selections from the second and third books, but that from the fourth has, justly or unjustly, tainted the whole in the eyes of most critics. It reproduces only too nakedly the original

where it would be better left alone, and it fails almost entirely even to attempt the sombre fury of sentiment, the inexpressible agony of regret, which transfuse and redeem that original itself. The first book of Homer and part of the sixth were avowedly done as an experiment, and it is difficult to be very sorry that the experiment was not pursued farther. But the versions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are very good. They, however, belong more properly to the next period, that of the *Fables*.

Dryden's *Juvenal* is not the least remarkable, and has been in some ways among the most fortunate of his works. It is still, if there be any such, the standard verse translation of the great Roman satirist, and this although much of it is not Dryden's. His two elder sons assisted him in the work, as well as some friends. But the first, third, sixth, tenth, and sixteenth satires are his own, as well as the whole of the *Persius*. The book was published in 1693, addressed to Dorset, with a prefatory essay or discourse on satire, which is of great interest and value. It is somewhat discursive, as is Dryden's wont, and the erudition which it contains is, as is also his wont, anything but invariably accurate. But it contains some precious autobiographic information, much capital criticism, and some of the best passages of its author's prose. He distinguishes between his own idea of satire and Juvenal's, approaching the former to that of Horace, which, however, is scarcely a tenable position. But, as has been sufficiently pointed out already, there are actually many and grave differences between the satire of Dryden and that of Juvenal. The former rarely or never even simulates indignation; the latter constantly and invariably expresses it. Still the poetical resemblances between the two men are sufficiently close to make the expectation of a

valuable version pretty confident, nor is that expectation disappointed. For a wonder Dryden resists, for the most part, his unhappy tendency to exaggerate the coarseness of his subjects, and to choose their coarsest parts in preference to others. No version of Juvenal could be other than shocking to those accustomed only to modern standards of literary language; but this version is perhaps less so than might be expected. The vigorous stamp of Dryden's verse is, moreover, admirably suited to represent the original, and the chief fault noticeable in it—a fault not uncommon with Dryden in translating—is an occasional lapse into an unpoetical vernacular, with the object, doubtless, of representing the text more vividly to English readers. The *Persius* is in this respect better than the *Juvenal*, though the peculiar dryness of flavour of the singular original is scarcely retained.

It is not known exactly when Dryden first conceived the idea of working up the scattered fragments of Virgilian translation which he had as yet attempted into a whole. The task, however, was regularly begun either at the end of 1693 or the beginning of 1694, and it occupied the best part of three years. A good deal of interest was generally felt in the proceeding, and many friends helped the poet with books or literary assistance of one kind or another. A great deal of it, too, was written during visits to hospitable acquaintances in the country. Much of it was doubtless done in Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire, at the houses of Mrs. Creed and of Driden of Chesterton. There is, indeed, a universally repeated tradition that the first lines were written with a diamond on a window in this latter mansion. The house was pulled down some seventy years ago, and a curious argument against the truth of the legend has been made

out of the fact that the pane was not preserved. Demolition, however, is not usually careful of its prey. Much was certainly written at Denham Court, in Buckinghamshire, the seat of Sir William Bowyer, whose gardens are commemorated in a note on the Georgics. The seventh book of the *Æneid* was done at Burleigh, Dryden having long had some connexion with the Exeter family. He had, it may be mentioned, always been fond of writing in the country. Tonson, the publisher, was exceedingly anxious that the book should be dedicated to William III., and Dryden speaks as if certain anticipations of gain had been held out to him in such a case. But he was unfalteringly determined to do nothing that would look like an abandonment of his principles. No single person received the honour of the dedication; but each division of the work was inscribed to a separate patron. The *Eclogues* fell to the lot of Lord Clifford, Dryden's co-religionist, and son of the "fierce and brave" if not very high-principled member of the Cabal to whom *Amboyna* had been dedicated long before. The *Georgics* were inscribed to Lord Chesterfield, a dedication which, with Dryden's subsequent reception and acknowledgment of a present from Chesterfield, is at least decisive against the supposed connexion between Lady Elizabeth and the Earl having been known to the poet. Mulgrave, now Marquis of Normanby, had the *Æneid*. The book was published in July, 1697, and the edition was sold off almost within the year. Dryden speaks to his sons, who were now at Rome, where they had employment in the Pope's household, with great pleasure of its success. It is, in truth, a sufficiently remarkable book. It was, no doubt, rather ironical of fate to assign Homer to Pope, who was of all poets the least Homeric, and Virgil to Dryden, than whom not many

poets have been more un-Virgilian. Pope would have done the Mantuan, whom in many things he resembles, excellently. Dryden has done him excellently too, only that the spirit of the translation is entirely different from that of the original. To say after Wordsworth that Dryden "spoils" all the best passages is quite unfair. But Wordsworth had no special faculty of criticism in the classical languages, and was of all recorded poets the most niggardly of praise, and the most prone to depreciation of others. Of the three parts as wholes the Georgics are perhaps done best, the Eclogues worst, the Æneid with most inequality. Yet the best passages of the epic are the best, beyond all doubt, of the whole version. A certain delicacy of touch, which Virgil especially requires, and of which Dryden was sufficiently master in his more original work, has often failed him here, but the bolder and more masculine passages are represented with a great deal of success. Those who believe, as I confess I myself believe, that all translation is unsatisfactory, and that poetical translation of poetry is nearly impossible, must of course always praise such work as this with a very considerable reservation. But when that reservation is made, there remains plenty of fairly disposable praise for this, Dryden's most considerable undertaking of a single and complete kind. The older translations have so far gone out of general reading in England that citation is in this case almost indispensable, as well for the purpose of showing what Dryden actually did give his readers in this famous book, as for that of exhibiting the progress he had made since the *Ovid* of sixteen years before. The passage I have chosen is the well-known opening of the descent into hell in the sixth book, which has not many superiors either in the original or in the version. The subject was

one that Dryden could handle well, whereas his Dido sometimes shows traces of incongruity,—

She said, and passed along the gloomy space;
The prince pursued her steps with equal pace.
Ye realms, yet unrevealed to human sight!
Ye gods, who rule the regions of the night!
Ye gliding ghosts! permit me to relate
The mystic wonders of your silent state.
Obscure they went through dreary shades, that led
Along the waste dominions of the dead.
Thus wander travellers in woods by night,
By the moon's doubtful and malignant light,
When Jove in dusky clouds involves the skies,
And the faint crescent shoots by fits before their eyes.
Just in the gate, and in the jaws of hell,
Revengeful Cares and sullen Sorrows dwell,
And pale Diseases and repining Age,
Want, Fear, and Famine's unresisted rage;
Here Toils, and Death, and Death's half-brother Sleep,
(Forms terrible to view) their centry keep;
With anxious Pleasures of a guilty mind,
Deep Frauds before, and open Force behind;
The Furies' iron beds; and Strife, that shakes
Her hissing tresses, and unfolds her snakes.
Full in the midst of this infernal road,
An elm displays her dusky arms abroad:
The god of sleep there hides his heavy head,
And empty dreams on every leaf are spread.
Of various forms unnumbered spectres more,
Centaurs, and double shapes, besiege the door
Before the passage, horrid Hydra stands,
And Briareus with all his hundred hands;
Gorgons, Geryon with his triple frame;
And vain Chimæra vomits empty flame.
The chief unsheathed his shining steel, prepared,
Though seized with sudden fear, to force the guard,
Offering his brandished weapon at their face;
Had not the Sibyl stopped his eager pace,
And told him what those empty phantoms were—
Forms without bodies, and impassive air.

Owing to the existence of some letters to Tonson, Walsh, and others, more is known about the pecuniary side of this transaction than about most of Dryden's money affairs. Tonson was an exceedingly hard bargain-driver, and there is extant a curious letter of his, in which he complains of the number of verses he has for his money, a complaint which, as we shall see when we come to the *Fables*, was at any rate in that case grossly unjust. The book was published by subscription, as Pope's *Homer* was subsequently, but the terms were not nearly so profitable to the poet. A hundred and two five-guinea subscribers had each his arms printed at the foot of one of the hundred and two plates Others who subscribed only two guineas merely figured in a list of names. But except a statement by Dryden in a letter that "the thirty shillings upon every book remains with me," the proportion in which the subscriptions were divided between author and publisher is unknown. He had, however, as Malone thinks, 50*l.* for each book of the *Æneid*,—as Mr. Christie and Mr. Hooper think, 50*l.* for each two books,—and no doubt there was some similar payment for the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. Altogether Pope heard that he made 1200*l.* by the *Virgil*. Presents too were doubtless sent him by Clifford and Mulgrave, as well as by Chesterfield. But Tonson's payments were anything but satisfactory, and Lord Macaulay has extracted much evidence as to the state of the coinage from Dryden's indignant letters on the subject. At one time he complains that in some money changed for Lady Elizabeth by Tonson, "besides the clipped money there were at least forty shillings brass." Then he expects "good silver, not such as he had formerly," and will not take gold, of course because of the renewed risk of bad money in change. Then complaints are made of Tonson

for refusing subscriptions (which shows that a considerable portion of the subscription-money must have gone to the poet), for declining to pay anything for notes, and so on. The most complimentary thing to Tonson in the correspondence is the remark, "All of your trade are sharpers, and you not more than others." In the next letter, however, the suspicion as to the goodness of Tonson's money returns,—"If you have any silver *which will go*, my wife will be glad of it." Elsewhere there is a half-apologetic allusion to a "sharp" letter which seems not to have been preserved. But Dryden had confidence enough in his publisher to make him do various pieces of fiduciary business for him, such as to receive his rents which had been brought up from Northamptonshire by the Towcester carrier, to get bills to pay a suspicious watchmaker who would not take gold, and the like. He too was the intermediary by which Dryden sent letters to his sons who were now in Rome, and he is accused of great carelessness and perhaps something worse in connexion with these letters. In another epistle we hear that "the printer is a beast," an accusation which it is to be feared has been repeated frequently since by impatient authors. Afterwards, in rather Landorian style—indeed, there are resemblances more than one between the two, and Landor was a constant admirer of Dryden—he "vows to God that if Everingham, the printer, takes not care of this impression, he shall never print anything more for him." These letters to Tonson about the *Virgil* and the *Fables* are among the most interesting memorials of Dryden that we possess, and, they are, with those to Mrs. Steward, almost the only letters of his which give much personal detail.[1]

[1] As, for instance, how (he is writing from Northamptonshire) a party of benighted strangers came in, and he had to give up his

Perhaps it is not superfluous to say that allusions in them to his wife are frequent, and show nothing either of any ill-feeling between the two, or of any neglect of household duty on her part. To one of the letters to his sons is a long postscript from Lady Elizabeth, in perhaps the most remarkable orthography that even English epistolary history has to show, but affectionate and motherly enough.

During the period which the last two chapters cover, Dryden had as usual not failed to undertake several minor and miscellaneous literary tasks. *Eleonora*, in 1692, was one of his least successful pieces in a literary point of view, but perhaps the most successful of all as a piece of journeywork. The poem is an elegy on the Countess of Abingdon: it was ordered by her husband, and paid for munificently. There are but 377 verses, and the fee was five hundred guineas, or on Tonson's method of calculation some seven or eight-and-twenty shillings a line—a rate which would have seemed to Jacob sinful, as encouraging poets to be extortionate with honest tradesmen. The piece is laboured and ill-sustained. If it deserved five hundred guineas, the Anne Killigrew ode would certainly have been cheap at five thousand. But not long afterwards a poem to Sir Godfrey Kneller, which may or may not have been exchanged for something of the other artist's craft, showed that Dryden had in no way lost his faculty of splendid flattery. Perhaps before and perhaps after this came the incomparable address to Congreve on the failure of the *Double Dealer*, which is and deserves to be one of Dryden's best-known works. Congreve and Southerne, the leading comic writer and the leading tragic writer of

bed to them, to which bed they would have gone supperless, had he not "taken a very lusty pike that day."

the younger generation, were among the principal of the band of sons (in Ben Jonson's phrase) whom Dryden had now gathered round him. In one of his letters there is a very pleasant picture of the two young men coming out four miles to meet the coach as he returned from one of his Northamptonshire visits, and escorting him to his house. This was in 1695, and in the same year Dryden brought out a prose translation of Du Fresnoy's *Art of Painting*, with a prefatory essay called a "Parallel of Poetry and Painting." There is not very much intrinsic value in this parallel, but it has an accidental interest of a curious kind. Dryden tells us that it occupied him for twelve mornings, and we are therefore able to calculate his average rate of working, since neither the matter nor the manner of the work betokens any extraordinary care, nor could it have required extraordinary research. The essay would fill between thirty and forty pages of the size of this present. Either in 1695 or in 1696 the poet also wrote a life of Lucian, intended to accompany a translation of the Dialogues made by various hands. This too, which did not appear till after the author's death, was something of a "pot-boiler," but the character of Dryden's prose work was amply redeemed by the "Discourse on Epic Poetry," which was the form that the dedication of the *Æneid* to Mulgrave took. This is not unworthy to rank with the "Essay on Dramatic Poesy" and the "Discourse on Satire."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FABLES.

It was beyond a doubt his practice in translation, and the remarkable success that attended it, which suggested to Dryden the last, and one of the most singular, but at the same time the most brilliantly successful of all his poetical experiments. His translations themselves were in many cases rather paraphrases than translations. He now conceived the idea of a kind of composition which was to be avowedly paraphrase. With the unfailing catholicity of taste which is one of his finest literary characteristics, he had always avoided the ignorant contempt with which the age was wont to look on mediæval literature. Even Cowley, we are told, when requested by one of his patrons to give an opinion on Chaucer, confessed that he could not relish him. If, when he planned an Arthurian epic, Dryden had happened to hit on the idea of "transversing" Mallory, we might have had an additional star of the first magnitude in English literature, though his ability to produce a wholly original epic may be doubted. At sixty-seven, writing hard for subsistence, he could not think of any such mighty attempt as this. But he took certain tales of Chaucer, and certain novels of Chaucer's master, Boccaccio, and applied his system to them. The result was the book of poems to

which, including as it did many Ovidian translations, and much other verse, he gave the name of *Fables*, using that word in its simple sense of stories. It is not surprising that this book took the town by storm. Enthusiastic critics, even at the beginning of the present century, assigned to *Theodore and Honoria* "a place on the very topmost shelf of English poetry." Such arrangements depend, of course, upon the definition of poetry itself. But I venture to think that it would be almost sufficient case against any such definition, that it should exclude the finest passages of the *Fables* from a position a little lower than that which Ellis assigned to them. It so happens that we are at the present day, in a position to put Dryden to a specially crucial test which his contemporaries were unable to apply. To us Chaucer is no longer an ingenious and intelligent but illegible barbarian. We read the *Canterbury Tales* with as much relish, and with nearly as little difficulty, as we read Spenser, or Milton, or Pope, or Byron, or our own living poets. *Palamon and Arcite* has, therefore, to us the drawback—if drawback it be—of being confronted on equal terms with its original. Yet I venture to say that, except in the case of those unfortunate persons whose only way of showing appreciation of one thing is by depreciation of something else, an acquaintance with the *Knight's Tale* injures Dryden's work hardly at all. There could not possibly be a severer test of at least formal excellence than this.

The *Fables* were published in a folio volume which, according to the contract with Tonson, was to contain 10,000 verses. The payment was 300*l.*, of which 250 guineas were paid down at the time of agreement, when three-fourths of the stipulated number of lines were actually handed over to the publisher. On this occasion,

at least, Jacob had not to complain of an unduly small consideration. For Dryden gave him not 2500, but nearly 5000 verses more, without, as far as is known, receiving any increase of his fee. The remainder of the 300*l.* was not to be paid till the appearance of a second edition, and this did not actually take place until some years after the poet's death. Pope's statement, therefore, that Dryden received "sixpence a line" for his verses, though not formally accurate, was sufficiently near the truth. It is odd that one of the happiest humours of Tom the First (Shadwell) occurring in a play written long before he quarrelled with Dryden, concerns this very practice of payment by line. In the *Sullen Lovers* one of the characters complains that his bookseller has refused him twelvepence a line, when the intrinsic worth of some verses is at least ten shillings, and all can be proved to be worth three shillings "to the veriest Jew in Christendom." So that Tonson was not alone in the adoption of the method. As the book finally appeared, the *Fables* contained, besides prefatory matter and dedications, five pieces from Chaucer (*Palamon and Arcite*, the *Cock and the Fox*, the *Flower and the Leaf*, the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the *Character of a Good Parson*), three from Boccaccio (*Sigismonda and Guiscardo*, *Theodore and Honoria*, *Cymon and Iphigenia*), the first book of the *Iliad*, some versions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in continuation of others previously published, an *Epistle to John Driden*, the second *St. Cecilia Ode*, commonly called *Alexander's Feast*, and an *Epitaph*.

The book was dedicated to the Duke of Ormond in a prose epistle, than which even Dryden never did anything better. It abounds with the fanciful expressions, just stopping short of conceit, which were such favourites with him, and which

he managed perhaps better than any other writer. He holds of the Ormond family, he tells the Duke, by a tenure of dedications, having paid that compliment to his Grace's grandfather, the great Duke of Ormond, and having celebrated Ossory in memorial verses. Livy, Publicola, and the history of Peru are brought in perhaps somewhat by the head and shoulders; but this was simply the fashion of the time, and the manner of the doing fully excused it. Even this piece, however, falls short, in point of graceful flattery, of the verse dedication of *Palamon and Arcite* to the Duchess. Between the two is the preface, which contains a rather interesting history of the genesis of the *Fables*. After doing the first book of Homer "as an essay to the whole work," it struck Dryden that he would try some of the passages on Homeric subjects in the *Metamorphoses*, and these in their turn led to others. When he had sufficiently extracted the sweets of Ovid, "it came into my mind that our old English poet Chaucer in many things resembled him;" and then, "as thoughts, according to Mr. Hobbs, have always some connexion," he was led to think of Boccaccio. The preface continues with critical remarks upon all three authors and their position in the history of their respective literatures, remarks which, despite some almost unavoidable ignorance on the writer's part as to the early condition and mutual relationship of modern languages, are still full of interest and value. It ends a little harshly, but naturally enough, in a polemic with Blackmore, Milbourn, and Collier. Not much need be said about the causes of either of these debates. Macaulay has told the Collier story well, and, on the whole, fairly enough, though he is rather too complimentary to the literary value of Collier's work. That redoubtable divine had all the right on his side, beyond a

doubt, but he sometimes carried his argument a good deal too far. Dryden, however, could not defend himself, and he knew this, and did not attempt it, though he could not always refrain, now and afterwards, from indulging in little flings at Collier. Blackmore had two causes of quarrel with Dryden—one the same as Collier's, the other a political one, the poetical knight being a staunch Whig. Milbourn was an obscure country clergyman, who had at one time been a great admirer of Dryden, as a letter of his still extant, in which he orders the poet's works to be sent to him, shows. He had, however, fallen foul of the *Virgil*, for which he received from Dryden due and perhaps more than due castigation.

Enough has been already said of the translations of Homer and Ovid. The latter, however, are, as far as mere verse goes, among the best of all the translations. *Palamon and Arcite*, however, and all the other contents of the book are of a very different order of interest. Dryden had an extreme admiration for this story, which as the subject for an epic he thought as good as either Homer's or Virgil's. Nowadays most people have left off considering the technical value of different subjects, which is no doubt a misfortune. But it is easy to see that the legend, with its interesting incidents, its contrast of character, its revolutions, and so forth, does actually come very near to the perfect idea of the artificial epic. The comparative nullity of the heroine would have been thought no drawback in ancient art. Dryden has divided the story into three books, and has, as usual, paraphrased with the utmost freedom, but he has kept closer to the dimensions of the original than is his wont. His three books do not much exceed the length of the original tale. In the different parts, however, he has used his own dis-

cretion in amplifying or contracting exactly as he thinks proper, and the comparison of different passages with the original thus brings out in a manifold way the idiosyncrasies of the two writers. Perhaps this is nowhere more marked than in the famous description of the Temple of Mars. As far as the temple itself goes, Dryden has the upper hand, but he is beaten when it comes to "the portraiture which was upon the wall." Sometimes he has simply adopted Chaucer's very words, sometimes he has done otherwise, and then he has almost always done worse. The "smiler with the knife under the cloak" is very inadequately replaced by three whole lines about hypocrisy. If the couplet

> Amiddes of the temple sate Mischaunce,
> And Discomfort and sory Countenance,

be contrasted with

> In midst of all the dome Misfortune sate,
> And gloomy Discontent and fell Debate,

the comparatively otiose epithets which in the next century were to be the curse of the style, strike the eye and ear very forcibly. Indeed, in this most finished work of Dryden's nothing is easier than to see the strength and the weakness of the method he had introduced. In his hands it turns almost always to strength. But in thus boldly bringing his work side by side with Chaucer's, he had indicated the divergence which was to be carried farther and farther by his followers, until the *mot propre* was lost altogether in a washy sea of elegant epithets and flowing versification. That time, however, was far off, or might have seemed to be far off, to a reader of the *Fables*. It is only when Chaucer is actually compared that the defects, or rather the possibilities of defect, rise to the eye. If *Palamon and Arcite* be read by itself, it is

almost entirely delightful, and, as has been said already, it will even bear the strain of comparison. For the loss is counterbalanced by gain, gain of sustained strength and greater perfection of workmanship, even though we may know well enough that Dryden's own idea of Chaucer's shortcomings in versification was a mere delusion.

The *Nun's Priest's Tale* was also not very much extended, though it was considerably altered in Dryden's version, entitled *The Cock and the Fox*. Dryden's fondness for the beast-story had, as we have seen already, drawn upon him the reprehension of Messrs. Prior and Montague, critics of severe and cultivated taste. It has just been suggested that a great loss has been sustained by his not having taken the fancy to transverse some Arthurian stories. In the same way, if he had known the original *Roman de Renart*, he would doubtless have made good use of it. *The Cock and the Fox* itself is inferior to many of the branches of the old tree, but it has not a few merits, and the story of the two friends is one of the very best things of the kind. To this Dryden has done ample justice. But in the original not the least attractive part is the solemn profusion of learned names and citations characteristic of the fourteenth century, which the translator has in some cases thought it better to omit. It may not be quite clear whether Chaucer, who generally had a kind of satirical undercurrent of intention in him, was serious in putting these into the mouths of Partlet and Chanticleer or not, but still one misses them. On the other hand, Dryden has made the most of the astrological allusions. For it must be remembered that he had a decided hankering after astrology, like many of the greatest men of his century. Of this there is evidence quite apart from Mrs. Thomas's stories, which also deal with the point.

The third of Dryden's Chaucerian versions is one of the most charming of all, and this, though the variations from the original are considerable, and though that original is itself one of the most delightful works of the kind.[1] I have read, perhaps as much as most Englishmen, the French fourteenth-century poetry on which so much of Chaucer's is modelled, but I hardly know either in French or English a poem more characteristic, and more delightfully characteristic of the fourteenth century than the *Flower and the Leaf*. The delight in a certain amiable kind of natural beauty, the transference of the signs and symbols of that beauty to the service of a fantastic and yet not unnatural poetry of love, the introduction of abstract and supernatural beings to carry out sometimes by allegory and sometimes by personification the object of the poet, are all exemplified in this little piece of some 500 or 600 lines, in a manner which it would be hard to match in Froissart or Guillaume de Machault. Yet Dryden has asserted his power of equalling the virtue of the original in what may be called an original translation. The two poems differ from one another considerably in details of machinery and imagery. Chaucer is happier in his descriptions of nature, Dryden in the representation of the central personages. But both alike have the power of transporting. Even now, when so much of his language and machinery have become hackneyed, Dryden can exert this power on those who are well acquainted with mediæval literature, who have felt its strange fascination, and the ease with which it carries off the reader into unfamiliar and yet delightful lands, where nothing is dis-

[1] I do not here concern myself with the hypothesis of the spuriousness of this poem.

turbing and unreasonable, and yet everything is surprising and unhackneyed. How much more strongly this power must have been exerted on a singularly prosaic age, in which the majority of persons would, like Prior and Montague, have cast aside as nonsense worthy only of children the gracious shadowy imaginations of mediæval thought, we in the nineteenth century can hardly put ourselves in the condition to estimate. But it must always remain one of Dryden's highest titles to fame that he was able thus to make extremes meet. He seems indeed to have had not only the far from ordinary faculty of recognizing good literature wherever he met it, but the quite extraordinary faculty of making other people recognize it too by translating it into the language which they were capable of comprehending. A passage may be worth quoting :—

To this the dame replied : "Fair daughter, know,
That what you saw was all a fairy show;
And all those airy shapes you now behold
Were human bodies once, and clothed with earthly mould.
Our souls, not yet prepared for upper light,
Till doomsday wander in the shades of night;
This only holiday of all the year,
We, privileged, in sunshine may appear;
With songs and dance we celebrate the day,
And with due honours usher in the May.
At other times we reign by night alone,
And posting through the skies pursue the moon;
But when the morn arises, none are found,
For cruel Demogorgon walks the round,
And if he finds a fairy lag in light,
He drives the wretch before, and lashes into night.
"All courteous are by kind; and ever proud
With friendly offices to help the good.
In every land we have a larger space
Than what is known to you of mortal race;
Where we with green adorn our fairy bowers,
And even this grove, unseen before, is ours.

Know farther, every lady clothed in white,
And crowned with oak and laurel every knight,
Are servants to the Leaf, by liveries known
Of innocence; and I myself am one.
Saw you not her so graceful to behold,
In white attire, and crowned with radiant gold?
The sovereign lady of our land is she,
Diana called, the queen of chastity;
And, for the spotless name of maid she bears,
That *Agnus castus* in her hand appears;
And all her train, with leafy chaplets crowned,
Were for unblamed virginity renowned;
But those the chief and highest in command
Who bear those holy branches in their hand,
The knights adorned with laurel crowns are they,
Whom death nor danger ever could dismay,
Victorious names, who made the world obey:
Who, while they lived, in deeds of arms excelled,
And after death for deities were held.
But those who wear the woodbine on their brow,
Were knights of love, who never broke their vow;
Firm to their plighted faith, and ever free
From fears, and fickle chance, and jealousy.
The lords and ladies, who the woodbine bear,
As true as Tristram and Isotta were."

Why Dryden selected the *Wife of Bath's Tale* among his few translations from Chaucer, it is not very easy to say. It is a sufficiently harmless *fabliau*, but it cannot be said to come up in point of merit to many others of the *Canterbury Tales*. The enemies of our poet would doubtless say that he selected it because of the unfavourable opinions as to womankind which it contains. But then those same enemies would find it difficult to say why he did not choose instead the scandalous prologue which unites opinions of womankind at least as unfavourable with other matter of the sort which hostile criticism supposes to have been peculiarly tempting to Dryden. In the

actual tale as given in the *Fables* there is some alloy of this kind, but nothing that could be at all shocking to the age. The length of the story is in proportion more amplified than is the case with the others. Probably the argumentative gifts of the old hag who turned out not to be an old hag attracted Dryden, for he was always at his best, and must have known that he was always at his best, in passages of the kind. The pleading of the crone is one of his best efforts. A certain desultoriness which is to be found in Chaucer is changed into Dryden's usual chain of serried argument, and it is much less surprising in the translation than in the original that the knight should have decided to submit at once to such a she-lawyer. But the "wife" herself has something to complain of Dryden. Her fancy for widowhood is delicately enough put in the original:—

> [Sende] grace to overlive them that we wed.

Dryden makes it much blunter:—

> May widows wed as often as they can,
> And ever for the better change their man.

The Character of a Good Parson admits itself to be "enlarged" from Chaucer, and indeed the termination, to the extent of some forty lines, is wholly new, and written with special reference to the circumstances of the time. To this character there is a pleasant little story attached. It seems from a letter to Pepys that the diarist had himself recommended the character in the original to Dryden's notice. When the verses were done, the poet told Pepys of the fact, and proposed to bring them for his inspection. The answer contained a sentence which displays a much greater antipathy to parsons than that which, if we may believe Lord Macaulay, who perhaps

borrowed the idea from Stillingfleet or Collier, Dryden himself felt. Pepys remarks that he hopes "from your copy of this good parson to fancy some amends made me for the hourly offence I bear with from the sight of so many lewd originals." What particular trouble Pepys had to bear at the hands of the lewd originals it would be hard to say. But—time-server as he had once been—he was in all probability sufficiently Jacobite at heart to relish the postscript in Dryden's version. This transfers the circumstances of the expulsion of the Nonjurors to the days of Richard the Second and Henry of Bolingbroke. Nor, had there still been a censorship of the press, is it at all probable that this postscript would have been passed for publication. The following verses are sufficiently pointed :—

> Conquest, an odious name, was laid aside ;
> When all submitted, none the battle tried.
> The senseless plea of right by providence
> Was by a flattering priest invented since,
> And lasts no longer than the present sway,
> But justifies the next which comes in play.
> The people's right remains ; let those who dare
> Dispute their power when they the judges are.

The character itself is also very much enlarged ; so much so, that the original can only be said to have furnished the heads for it. Dryden has done few better things.

The selections from Boccaccio, like those from Chaucer, may or may not have been haphazard. The first, at any rate, which has been as a rule the worst thought of, explains itself sufficiently. The story of *Tancred and Sigismunda* perhaps afforded room for "loose descriptions:" it certainly afforded room for the argument in verse of which Dryden was so great a master. Although the hints of the original have been somewhat coarsely

amplified, the speech of Sigismunda is still a very noble piece of verse, and her final address to her husband's heart almost better. Here is a specimen :—

"Thy praise (and thine was then the public voice)
First recommended Guiscard to my choice:
Directed thus by thee, I looked, and found
A man I thought deserving to be crowned;
First by my father pointed to my sight,
Nor less conspicuous by his native light;
His mind, his mien, the features of his face,
Excelling all the rest of human race:
These were thy thoughts, and thou couldst judge aright,
Till interest made a jaundice in thy sight.
Or should I grant thou didst not rightly see,
Then thou wert first deceived, and I deceived by thee.
But if thou shalt allege, through pride of mind,
Thy blood with one of base condition joined,
'Tis false; for 'tis not baseness to be poor:
His poverty augments thy crime the more;
Upbraids thy justice with the scant regard
Of worth; whom princes praise, they should reward
Are these the kings intrusted by the crowd
With wealth, to be dispensed for common good?
The people sweat not for their king's delight,
To enrich a pimp, or raise a parasite;
Theirs is the toil; and he who well has served
His country, has his country's wealth deserved.
Even mighty monarchs oft are meanly born,
And kings by birth to lowest rank return;
All subject to the power of giddy chance,
For fortune can depress, or can advance;
But true nobility is of the mind,
Not given by chance, and not to chance resigned.
"For the remaining doubt of thy decree,
What to resolve, and how dispose of me;
Be warned to cast that useless care aside,
Myself alone will for myself provide.
If in thy doting and decrepit age,
Thy soul, a stranger in thy youth to rage,

Begins in cruel deeds to take delight,
Gorge with my blood thy barbarous appetite;
For I so little am disposed to pray
For life, I would not cast a wish away.
Such as it is, the offence is all my own;
And what to Guiscard is already done,
Or to be done, is doomed by thy decree,
That, if not executed first by thee,
Shall on my person be performed by me.
"Away! with women weep, and leave me here,
Fixed, like a man, to die without a tear;
Or save, or slay us both this present hour,
'Tis all that fate has left within thy power."

The last of the three, *Cymon and Iphigenia*, has been a great favourite. In the original it is one of the most uninteresting stories of the *Decameron*, the single incident of Cymon's falling in love, of which not very much is made, being the only relief to a commonplace tale of violence and treachery, in which neither the motives nor the characters of the actors sufficiently justify them. The Italian too, by making Iphigenia an unwilling captive, takes away from Cymon the only excuse he could have had. The three charming lines with which Dryden's poem opens,

Old as I am, for lady's love unfit,
The power of beauty I remember yet,
Which once inflamed my soul, and still inspires my wit,

have probably bribed a good many readers, and certainly the whole volume of the *Fables* is an ample justification of the poet's boast, not only as regards beauty of one kind, but of all. The opening triplet is followed by a diatribe against Collier, which at first seems in very bad taste; but it is made with excellent art to lead on to a description of the power of love, to which the story yokes

itself most naturally. Nor is any praise too high for the description of the actual scene in which Cymon is converted from his brutishness by the sight of Iphigenia, an incident of which, as has been said, the original takes small account. But even with the important alterations which Dryden has introduced into it, the story, as a story, remains of but second-rate interest.

Nothing of this sort can be said of *Theodore and Honoria*. I have said that Ellis's commendation of it may be excessive. But that it goes at the head of all the poetry of the school of which Dryden was a master is absolutely certain. The original here is admirably suggestive: the adaptation is more admirable in its obedience to the suggestions. It has been repeatedly noticed with what art Dryden has gradually led up to the horror of the phantom lady's appearance, which is in the original introduced in an abrupt and casual way; while the matter-of-factness of the spectre's address, both to Theodore himself and to the friends who wish afterwards to interfere in his victim's favour, is most happily changed in the English poem. Boccaccio indeed, master as he was of a certain kind of pathos, did not, at least in the *Decameron*, succeed with this particular sort of tragedy. His narrative has altogether too much of the chronicle in it to be fully impressive. Here Dryden's process of amplification has been of the utmost service. At almost every step of the story he has introduced new touches which transform it altogether, and leave it at the close a perfect piece of narrative of the horrible kind. The same abruptness which has been noticed in the original version of the earlier part of the story appears in the later. In Dryden, Honoria, impressed with the sight and with Theodore's subsequent neglect of her, dreams of what she has seen, and thinks

over what she has dreamt, at last, and only at last, resolving to subdue her pride and consent to Theodore's suit. Boccaccio's heroine goes straight home in a business-like manner, and sends "a trusty damsel" that very evening to inform her lover that she surrenders. This is, to say the least, sudden. In short, the comparison is here wholly in favour of the English poet. Nor if we drop the parallel, and look at *Theodore and Honoria* merely by itself, is it less admirable.

The purely original poems remain to be noticed. Of the *Epistle to John Driden* we know that Dryden himself thought highly, while the person to whom it was addressed was so pleased with it that he gave him "a noble present," said by family tradition to have been 500*l.*, but which Malone, *ex sua conjectura*, reduces to 100*l.* John Driden was the poet's cousin, and his frequent host at Chesterton. He was a bachelor, his house being kept by his sister Honor; he was a member of Parliament and an enthusiastic sportsman. Chesterton had come into the Dryden family by marriage, and John Driden inherited it as the second son. The poem contains, in allusion to Driden's bachelorhood, one of those objurgations on matrimony which have been interpreted in a personal sense, but which are, in all probability, merely the commonplaces of the time. Besides wives, physicians were a frequent subject of Dryden's satire; and the passage in this poem about the origin of medicine has been learnt by almost every one. It might not have been written but for Blackmore's sins, for Dryden had, in the postscript to his *Virgil*, paid an elaborate compliment to two ornaments of the profession. But it is naturally enough connected with a compliment to his cousin's sportsmanship. Then there is what might be called a "Character of

a good Member of Parliament," fashioned, of course, to suit the case of the person addressed, who, though not exactly a Jacobite, was a member of the Opposition. The poem ends with a most adroit compliment at once to the subject and to the writer. These complimentary pieces always please posterity with a certain drawback, unless, like the lines to Congreve, and the almost more beautiful lines on Oldham, they deal with merits which are still in evidence, and are not merely personal. But the judgment of Dorset and Montague, who thought of this piece and of the exquisite verses to the Duchess of Ormond that he "never writ better," was not far wrong.

The only piece that remains to be noticed is better known even than the *Epistle to John Driden*. *Alexander's Feast* was the second ode which Dryden wrote for the "Festival of St. Cecilia." He received for it 40*l*., which, as he tells his sons that the writing of it "would be noways beneficial," was probably unexpected, if the statement as to the payment is true. There are other legendary contradictions about the time occupied in writing it, one story saying that it was done in a single night, while another asserts that he was a fortnight in composing or correcting it. But, as has been frequently pointed out, the two statements are by no means incompatible. Another piece of gossip about this famous ode is that Dryden at first wrote Lais instead of Thais, which "small mistake" he bids Tonson in a letter to remember to alter. Little criticism of *Alexander's Feast* is necessary. Whatever drawbacks its form may have (especially the irritating chorus), it must be admitted to be about the best thing of its kind, and nothing more can be demanded of any poetry than to be excellent in its kind. Dryden himself

thought it the best of all his poetry, and he had a remarkable faculty of self-criticism.

This volume of poems was not only the last that Dryden produced, but it also exhibits his poetical character in its very best and most perfect form. He had, through all his long literary life, been constantly a student, always his own scholar, always correcting, varying, re-arranging, and refining. The citations already given will have shown at what perfection of metre he had by this time arrived. Good as his early (if not his earliest) works are in this respect, it must be remembered that it was long before he attained his greatest skill. Play-writing in rhyme and blank verse, practice in stanzas, and pindarics, and irregular lyrical measures, all went to furnish him with the experience he required, and which certainly was not in his case the school of a fool.

Beginning with a state of pupilage to masters who were none of the best, he subsequently took little instruction, except of a fragmentary kind, from any living man except Milton in poetry, and, as he told Congreve, Tillotson in prose. But he was none the less constantly teaching himself. His vocabulary is naturally a point of great importance in any consideration of his influence on our literature. His earliest work exhibits many traces of the scholastic and pedantic phraseology of his immediate forerunners. It is probable that in his second period, when his activity was chiefly dramatic, he might have got rid of this, had not the tendency been strengthened by the influence of Milton. At one period, again, the Gallicizing tendencies of the time led him to a very improper and inexcusable importation of French words. This, however, he soon dropped. In the meridian of his powers, when his great satires were produced, these tendencies, the classical and the Gallican,

in action and re-action with his full command of English, vernacular and literary, produced a dialect which, if not the most graceful that the language has ever known, is perhaps the strongest and most nervous. Little change takes place in the last twenty years, though the tendency to classicism and archaism, strengthened it may be by the work of translation, not unfrequently reappears. In versification the great achievement of Dryden was the alteration of what may be called the balance of the line, causing it to run more quickly and to strike its rhymes with a sharper and less prolonged sound. One obvious means of obtaining this end was, as a matter of course, the isolation of the couplet and the avoidance of overlapping the different lines one upon the other. The effect of this overlapping, by depriving the eye and voice of the expectation of rest at the end of each couplet, is always one of two things. Either the lines are converted into a sort of rhythmic prose, made musical by the rhymes rather than divided by them, or else a considerable pause is invited at the end of each, or of most lines, and the cadence of the whole becomes comparatively slow and languid. Both these forms, as may be seen in the works of Mr. Morris, as well as in the older writers, are excellently suited for narration of some considerable length. They are less well suited for satire, for argument, and for the moral reflections which the age of Dryden loved. He therefore set himself to elaborate the couplet with its sharp point, its quick delivery, and the pistol-like detonation of its rhyme. But there is an obvious objection, or rather there are several obvious objections which present themselves to the couplet. It was natural that to one accustomed to the more varied range of the older rhythm and metre, there might seem to be a danger of the snip-snap monotony into which, as

we know, it did actually fall when it passed out of the hands of its first great practitioners. There might also be a fear that it would not always be possible to compress the sense of a complete clause within the narrow limits of twenty syllables. To meet these difficulties Dryden resorted to three mechanical devices,—the hemistich, the Alexandrine, and the triplet; all three of which could be used indifferently to eke out the space or to give variety of sound. The use of the hemistich, or fragmentary line, appears to have been based partly on the well-known practice of Virgil, partly on the necessities of dramatic composition where the unbroken English couplet is to English ears intolerable. In poetry proper the hemistich is anything but pleasing, and Dryden becoming convinced of the fact almost discarded it. The Alexandrine and the triplet he always continued to use, and they are to this day the most obvious characteristics, to a casual observer, of his versification. To the Alexandrine, judiciously used, and limited to its proper acceptation of a verse of twelve syllables, I can see no objection. The metre, though a well-known English critic has maltreated it of late, is a very fine one; and some of Dryden's own lines are unmatched examples of that "energy divine" which has been attributed to him. In an essay on the Alexandrine in English poetry, which yet remains to be written, and which would be not the least valuable of contributions to poetical criticism, this use of the verse would have to be considered, as well as its regular recurrent employment at the close of the Spenserian stanza, and its continuous use, of which not many poets besides Drayton and Mr. Browning have given us considerable examples. An examination of the *Polyolbion* and of *Fifine at the Fair*, side by side, would, I think, reveal capacities somewhat unexpected even in this form

of arrangement. But so far as the occasional Alexandrine is concerned, it is not a hyperbole to say that a number, out of all proportion, of the best lines in English poetry may be found in the closing verses of the Spenserian stave as used by Spenser himself, by Shelley, and by the present Laureate, and in the occasional Alexandrines of Dryden. The only thing to be said against this latter use is, that it demands a very skilful ear and hand to adjust the cadence. So much for the Alexandrine.

For the triplet I must confess myself to be entirely without affection. Except in the very rare cases when its contents come in, in point of sense, as a kind of parenthesis or aside, it seems to me to spoil the metre, if anything could spoil Dryden's verse. That there was some doubt about it even in the minds of those who used it, may be inferred from the care they generally took to accompany it in print with the bracket indicator, as if to invite the eye to break it gently to the ear. So strong was Dryden's verse, so well able to subdue all forms to its own measure, that in him it mattered but little ; in his followers its drawbacks at once appeared.

A few personal details not already alluded to remain as to Dryden's life at this time. To this period belongs the second and only other considerable series of his letters. They are addressed to Mrs. Steward, a cousin of his, though of a much younger generation. Mrs. Steward was the daughter of Mrs. Creed, the already-mentioned indefatigable decorator of Northamptonshire churches and halls, and she herself was given to the arts of painting and poetry. She had married Mr. Elmes Steward, a mighty sportsman, whose house at Cotterstock still exists by the roadside from Oundle to Peterborough. The correspondence extends over the last eighteen months of the

poet's life, beginning in October, 1698, and not ending till a week or two before his death in the spring of 1700. Mrs. Steward is said to have been about eight-and-twenty at the time, and beautiful. The first letter speaks of a visit soon to be paid to Cotterstock after many invitations, and is rather formal in style. Thenceforward, however, the epistles, sometimes addressed to Mr. Steward (Dryden not infrequently spells it Stewart and Stuart), and sometimes to his wife, are very cordial, and full of thanks for presents of country produce. On one occasion Dryden "intends" that Lady Elizabeth should "taste the plover he had received," an incident upon which, if I were a commentator, I should build a legend of conjugal happiness quite as plausible, and probably quite as well founded, as the legend of conjugal unhappiness which has actually been constructed. Then there are injurious allusions to a certain parson's wife at Tichmarsh, who is "just the contrary" of Mrs. Steward. Marrow puddings are next acknowledged, which it seems were so good that they had quite spoiled Charles Dryden's taste for any other. Then comes that sentence, "Old men are not so insensible of beauty as, it may be, you young ladies think," which was elsewhere translated into eloquent verse, and the same letter describes the writer as passing his time "sometimes with Ovid, sometimes with our old English poet Chaucer." More acknowledgments of presents follow, and then a visit is promised, with the prayer that Mrs. Steward will have some small beer brewed for him without hops, or with a very inconsiderable quantity, because the bitter beer at Tichmarsh had made him very ill. The visit came off in August, 1699, and it is to be hoped that the beer was not bitter. After his return the poet sends, in the pleasant old fashion, a history of his journey back to London,

whither the stage coach took him out of his way, whereby not passing certain friends' houses, he missed "two couple of rabbits, and Mr. Cole's Ribadavia wine," a stirrup cup of the latter being probably intended. In November occurs the famous description of himself as "a man who has done his best to improve the language, and especially the poetry," with much literary and political gossip, and occasional complaints of bad health. This letter may perhaps be quoted as a specimen :—

Nov. 7, 1699.

MADAM,—Even your expostulations are pleasing to me; for though they show you angry, yet they are not without many expressions of your kindness; and therefore I am proud to be so chidden. Yet I cannot so farr abandon my own defence, as to confess any idleness or forgetfulness on my part. What has hind'red me from writeing to you, was neither ill health, nor, a worse thing, ingratitude; but a flood of little businesses, which yet are necessary to my subsistance, and of which I hop'd to have given you a good account before this time: but the Court rather speaks kindly of me, than does anything for me, though they promise largely; and perhaps they think I will advance as they go backward, in which they will be much deceiv'd; for I can never go an inch beyond my conscience and my honour. If they will consider me as a man who has done my best to improve the language, and especially the poetry, and will be content with my acquiescence under the present government, and forbearing satire on it, that I can promise, because I can perform it; but I can neither take the oaths, nor forsake my religion; because I know not what church to go to, if I leave the Catholique; they are all so divided amongst themselves in matters of faith necessary to salvation, and yet all assumeing the name of Protestants. May God be pleased to open your eyes, as he has open'd mine! Truth is but one; and they who have once heard of it, can plead no excuse, if they do not embrace it. But these are things too serious for a trifling letter. If you desire to hear anything more of my affairs, the Earl of Dorsett, and

your cousin Montague, have both seen the two poems, to the Duchess of Ormond and my worthy cousin Driden; and are of opinion, that I never writt better. My other friends are divided in their judgments, which to preferr; but the greater part are for those to my dear kinsman; which I have corrected with so much care, that they will now be worthy of his sight, and do neither of us any dishonour after our death.

There is this day to be acted a new tragedy, made by Mr. Hopkins, and, as I believe, in rhime. He has formerly written a play in verse, called *Boadicea*, which you fair ladyes lik'd; and is a poet who writes good verses, without knowing how or why; I mean, he writes naturally well, without art, or learning, or good sence. Congreve is ill of the gout at Barnet Wells. I have had the honour of a visite from the Earl of Dorsett, and din'd with him. Matters in Scotland are in a high ferment, and next door to a breach betwixt the two nations; but they say from court, that France and we are hand and glove. 'Tis thought the king will endeavour to keep up a standing army, and make the stirr in Scotland his pretence for it; my cousin Driden, and the country party, I suppose, will be against it; for when a spirit is raised, 'tis hard conjuring him down again. You see I am dull by my writeing news; but it may be my cousin Creed may be glad to hear what I believe is true, though not very pleasing. I hope he recovers health in the country, by his staying so long in it. My service to my cousin Stuart, and all at Oundle.

I am, faire Cousine,
Your most obedient servant,
JOHN DRYDEN.

For Mrs. Stewart, Att
Cotterstock, near Oundle,
In Northamptonshire,
These.
To be left at the Post-house in Oundle.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

DRYDEN'S life lasted but a very short time after the publication of the *Fables*. He was, if not a very old man, close upon his seventieth year. He had worked hard, and had probably lived no more carefully than most of the men of his time. Gout, gravel, and other disorders tormented him sorely. The *Fables* were published in November, 1699, and during the winter he was more or less ill. As has been mentioned, many letters of his exist in reference to this time, more in proportion than for any other period of his life. Besides those to Mrs. Steward, there are some addressed to Mrs. Thomas, a young and pretty literary lady, who afterwards fell among the Philistines, and who made use of her brief intimacy with the Dryden family to romance freely about it, when in her later days she was indigent, in prison, and what was worse, in the employ of Curll. One of these letters contains the frankest and most graceful of Dryden's many apologies for the looseness of his writings, accompanied by a caution to "Corinna" against following the example of the illustrious Aphra Behn, a caution which was a good deal needed, though unfortunately fruitless. In the early spring of 1700, or, according to the calendar of the day, in the last months of 1699, some of Dryden's admirers got up a

benefit performance for him at the Duke's Theatre. Fletcher's *Pilgrim* was selected for the occasion, revised by Vanbrugh, and with the addition of a lyrical scene by Dryden himself. He also wrote for the occasion a secular masque to celebrate the opening of the new century: the controversy on the point whether 1700 belonged to the seventeenth century or the eighteenth not having, it seems, arisen. The performance took place, but the date of it is uncertain, and it has been thought that it was not till after Dryden's death. This happened in the following wise. During the months of March and April Dryden was very ill with gout. One toe became much inflamed, and not being properly attended to, it mortified. Hobbs, the surgeon, was then called in, and advised amputation, but Dryden refused on the score of his age, and the inutility of prolonging a maimed existence. The mortification spreading further, it was a case for amputation of the entire leg, with probably dubious results, or else for certain death. On the 30th of April the *Postboy* announced that "John Dryden, Esq., the famous poet, lies a-dying," and at three o'clock the next morning he died very quietly and peacefully.

His funeral was sufficiently splendid. Halifax is said to have at first offered to discharge the whole cost himself, but other friends were anxious to share it, among whom Dorset and Lord Jeffreys, the Chancellor's son, are specially mentioned. The body was embalmed, and lay in state at the College of Physicians for some days. On the 13th of May the actual funeral took place at Westminster Abbey, with a great procession, preceded at the College by a Latin oration from Garth the President, and by the singing of *Exegi Monumentum* to music. Years afterwards "Corinna" forged for Curll a wild account of the matter,

of which it is sufficient to say that it lacks the slightest corroboration, and is intrinsically improbable, if not impossible. It may be found in most of the biographies, and Malone has devoted his usual patient industry to its demolition. Sometime passed before any monument was erected to Dryden in Poet's Corner, where he had been buried by Chaucer and Cowley. Pepys tells us that Dorset and Montague were going to do it. But they did not. Sometime later Congreve complimented the Duke of Newcastle on having given order for a monument, a compliment which his Grace obtained at a remarkably cheap rate, for the order, if given, was never executed. Finally, twenty years after his death, the Duke of Buckinghamshire, better known under his former title of Lord Mulgrave, came to the rescue, it is said, owing to a reflection of Pope's on Dryden's "rude and nameless stone." The monument was not magnificent, but at any rate it saves the poet from such dishonour as there may be in a nameless grave. The hymn sung at his funeral probably puts that matter most sensibly.

Dryden's wife lived until 1714, and died a very old woman and insane. Her children, like her husband, had died before her. Charles, the eldest, was drowned in the Thames near Datchet in 1704; John, the second, hardly outlived his father a year, and died at Rome in 1701; the third, Erasmus Henry, succeeded in 1710 to the family honours, but died in the same year. The house of Canons Ashby is still held by descendants of the family, but in the female line; though the name has been unbroken, and the title has been continued.

Something has already been said about the character of Lady Elizabeth Dryden. It has to be added here that the stories about her temper and relations with her hus-

band and his friends, bear investigation as little as those about her maidenly conduct. Most of them are mere hearsays, and some not even that. Dryden, it is said, must have lived unhappily with his wife, for he is always sneering at matrimony. It is sufficient to say that much the same might be said of every writer (at least for the stage) between the Restoration and the accession of Anne. Even the famous line in *Absalom and Achitophel*, which has caused such scandal, is a commonplace as old at least as Jean de Meung and the *Roman de la Rose*. When Malone, on the authority of a Lady Dryden who lived a hundred years later, but without a tittle of documentary evidence, tells us that Lady Elizabeth was a shrew, we really must ask what is the value of such testimony? There is one circumstantial legend which has been much relied on. Dryden, it is said, was at work one day in his study, when his wife came in, and could not make him listen to something she had to say. Thereupon said she in a pet, "I wish I were a book, and then perhaps you would pay me some attention." "Then, my dear," replied this graceless bard, "pray be an almanac, that I may change you at the end of the year." The joke cannot be said to be brilliant, but, taking it as a true story, the notion of founding a charge of conjugal unhappiness thereon is sufficiently absurd. Mrs. Thomas's romancings are worthy of no credit, and even if they were worthy of any, do not bear much upon the question. All that can be said is, that the few allusions to Lady Elizabeth in the poet's letters are made in all propriety, and tell no tale of disunion. Of his children it is allowed that he was excessively fond, and his personal amiability is testified to with one consent by all his friends who have left testimonies on the subject. Congreve and "Granville the Polite" both mention his

modest and unassuming demeanour, and the obligingness of his disposition. Pope, it is true, has brought against him the terrible accusation that he was "not a genteel man," being "intimate with none but poetical men." The fact on which the charge seems to be based is more than dubious, and Pope was evidently transferring his own conception of Grub Street to the times when to be a poetical man certainly was no argument against gentility. Rochester, Mulgrave, Dorset, Sedley, Etherege, Roscommon, make a very odd assortment of ungenteel poetical friends.

It is astonishing, when one comes to examine the matter, how vague and shadowy our personal knowledge of Dryden is. A handful of anecdotes, many of them undated and unauthenticated except at third and fourth hand, furnish us with almost all that we do know. That he was fond of fishing, and prided himself upon being a better fisherman than Durfey; that he took a good deal of snuff; and that he did not drink much until Addison, in the last years of his life, induced him to do so, almost exhausts the lists of such traits which are recorded by others. His "down look," his plumpness, his fresh colour are points in which tradition is pretty well supported by the portraits which exist, and by such evidence as can be extracted from the libels against him. The famous picture of him at Will's, which every one repeats, and which Scott has made classical in the *Pirate*, is very likely true enough to fact, and there is no harm in thinking of Dryden in the great coffee-house, with his chair in the balcony in summer, by the fire in winter, passing criticisms and paying good-natured compliments on matters literary. He had, he tells Mrs. Steward, a very vulgar stomach—thus partially justifying Pope's accusations—and liked a chine of bacon better than marrow

puddings. He dignified Samuel Pepys with the title of *Padron Mio*, and was invited by Samuel to eat a cold chicken and a salad with him in return. According to one of the aimless gossiping stories, which are almost all we possess, he once stayed with Mulgrave at the great Yorkshire domain whence the title was derived, and was cheated by Mulgrave at bowls—a story not so unbelievable as Mr. Bell seems to think, for everybody cheated at play in those days ; and Mulgrave's disinclination to pay his tradesmen, or in any other way to get rid of money, was notorious. But even the gossip which has come down to us is almost entirely literary. Thus we are told that when he allowed certain merits to "starch Johnny Crowne"—so called because of the unalterable stiffness and propriety of his collar and cravat—he used to add that "his father and Crowne's mother had been great friends." It is only fair to the reputation of Erasmus Dryden and of Mrs. Crowne to add that this must have been pure mischief, inasmuch as it is always said that the author of *Sir Courtly Nice* was born in Nova Scotia. His well-feigned denunciation of Smith and Johnson, his tormentors, or rather the tormentors of his Eidolon Bayes, as "the coolest and most insignificant fellows" he had ever seen on the stage, may be also recalled. Again, there is a legend that Bolingbroke, when a young man, came in one morning to see him, and found that he had been sitting up all night writing the ode on St. Cecilia's Day. Another time Bolingbroke called on him, and was asked to outstay Jacob Tonson, so as to prevent some apprehended incivility from the truculent Jacob. The story of his vexation at the liberty taken with him by Prior and Montague has been already mentioned more than once, but may be regarded with very considerable suspicion. Most famous perhaps of all

such legends is that which tells of the unlucky speech, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet," than which never was there anything more true or more unfortunate. Yet the enmity which, though it has been exaggerated, the greatest English man of letters in the next generation felt towards his kinsman ought not to be wholly regretted, because it has produced one of the most touching instances of literal devotion which even a commentator ever paid to his idol. Swift, it must be remembered, has injuriously stigmatized Dryden's prefaces as being

> Merely writ at first for filling,
> To raise the volume's price a shilling.

Hereupon Malone has set to, and has gravely demonstrated that, as the price at which plays were then issued was fixed and constant, the insertion of a long preface instead of a short one, or indeed of any preface at all, could not have raised the volume's price a penny. Next to Shadwell's criticism on *Macflecknoe*, I think this may be allowed to be the happiest example recorded in connexion with the life of Dryden of the spirit of literalism.

Such idle stuff as these legends mostly are is indeed hardly worth discussion, hardly even worth mentioning. The quiet scenery of the Nene Valley, in which Dryden passed all the beginning and not a little of the close of his life; the park at Charlton; the river (an imaginary association perhaps, but too striking a one to be lost) on which Crites and Eugenius and Neander rowed down past the "great roar of waters" at London Bridge, and heard the Dutch guns as they talked of dramatic poesy; the house in Gerrard Street; the balcony and coffee-room at Will's; the park where the king walked with the poet; and, last of all, the Abbey: these are the only scenes in which Dryden can be pictured even by the most imagi-

native lover of the concrete picturesque. Very few days of his life of nearly seventy years emerge for us from the mass by virtue of any definite and detailed incident, the account of which we have on trustworthy authority. It is a commonplace to say that an author's life is in his works. But in Dryden's case it is a simple fact, and therefore a biography of him, let it be repeated at the close as it was asserted at the beginning, must consist of little but a discussion and running comment on those works, and on the characteristics, literary and personal, which are discoverable in them.

It only now remains to sum up these characteristics, which it must never be forgotten are of even more value because of the representative character of Dryden than because of his individual eminence. Many as are the great men of letters who have illustrated English literature from the beginning to the present day, it may safely be said that no one so represented his time and so influenced it as the man of letters whom we have been discussing. There are greater names in our literature, no doubt; there are others as great or nearly so. But at no time that I can think of was there any Englishman who, for a considerable period, was so far in advance of his contemporaries in almost every branch of literary work as Dryden was during the last twenty years of the seventeenth century. To turn a satiric couplet of his own, by the alteration of a single word, from an insult to a compliment, we may say that he, at any rate during his last decade,

> In prose and verse was owned without dispute
> Within the realms of *English* absolute.

But his representative character in relation to the men of his time was almost more remarkable than his intellectual and artistic superiority to them. Other great men of letters,

with perhaps the single exception of Voltaire, have usually, when they represented their time at all, represented but a small part of it. With Dryden this was not the case. Not only did the immense majority of men of letters in his later days directly imitate him, but both then and earlier most literary Englishmen, even when they did not imitate him, worked on the same lines and pursued the same objects. The eighteen volumes of his works contain a faithful representation of the whole literary movement in England for the best part of half a century, and what is more, they contain the germs and indicate the direction of almost the whole literary movement for nearly a century more.

But Dryden was not only in his literary work a typical Englishman of his time, and a favourably typical one; he was almost as representative in point of character. The time was not the most showy or attractive in the moral history of the nation, though perhaps it looks to us not a little worse than it was. But it must be admitted to have been a time of shameless coarseness in language and manners; of virulent and bloodthirsty party-spirit; of almost unparalleled self-seeking and political dishonesty; and of a flattering servility to which, in the same way, hardly any parallel can be found. Its chief redeeming features were, that it was not a cowardly age, and, for the most part, not a hypocritical one. Men seem frequently to have had few convictions, and sometimes to have changed them with a somewhat startling rapidity. But when they had them, they had also the courage of them. They hit out with a vigour and a will which to this day is refreshing to read of; and when, as sometimes happened, they lost the battle, they took their punishment, as with perhaps some arrogance we are wont to say, like Englishmen. Dryden had the merits and the defects

eminently ; but the defects were, after all, in a mild and by no means virulent form. His character has had exceedingly hard measure since. During the last ten years of his life, and for the most part of the half-century succeeding his death, his political principles were out of favour, and this naturally prejudiced many persons against his conduct even at the time when his literary eminence was least questioned. In Johnson and in Scott, Dryden found a brace of the doughtiest champions, as heartily prepossessed in his favour as they were admirably armed to fight his battles. But of late years he has again fallen among the Philistines. It was obviously Lord Macaulay's game to blacken the greatest literary champion of the cause he had set himself to attack ; and I need not say with what zest and energy Macaulay was wont to wield the tar-brush. Some years later Dryden had the good fortune to meet with an admirable editor of his poems. I venture to think the late Mr. Christie's Globe edition of our poet one of the very best things of the kind that has ever been produced. From the purely literary point of view there is scarcely a fault to be found with it. But the editor unfortunately seems to have sworn allegiance to Shaftesbury before he swore allegiance to Dryden. He reconciled these jarring fealties by sacrificing the character of the latter, while admitting his intellectual greatness. An article to which I have more than once referred in the *Quarterly Review* puts the facts once more in a clear and fair light. But Mr. Green's twice-published history has followed in the old direction, and has indeed out-Macaulayed Macaulay in reckless abuse. I believe that I have put the facts at least so that any reader who takes the trouble may judge for himself of the private conduct of Dryden. His behaviour as a public man has

also been dealt with pretty fully; and I think we may safely conclude that in neither case can the verdict be a really unfavourable one. Dryden, no doubt, was not austerely virtuous. He was not one of the men who lay down a comprehensive scheme of moral, political, and intellectual conduct, and follow out that scheme, come wind, come weather. It is probable that he was quite aware of the existence and alive to the merits of cakes and ale. He was not an economical man, and he had no scruple in filling up gaps in his income with pensions and presents. But all these things were the way of his world, and he was not excessive in following it. On the other hand, all trustworthy testimony concurs in praising his amiable and kindly disposition, his freedom from literary arrogance, and his willingness to encourage and assist youthful aspirants in literature. Mercilessly hard as he hit his antagonists, it must be remembered that he was rarely the first to strike. On the whole, putting aside his licence of language, which is absolutely inexcusable, but for which it must be remembered he not only made an ample apology, but such amends as were possible by earnestly dissuading others from following his example, we shall be safe in saying that, though he was assuredly no saint, there were not so very many better men then living than John Dryden.

A shorter summary will suffice for the literary aspect of the matter; for Dryden's peculiarities in this respect have already been treated fully enough. In one of his own last letters he states that his life-object had been to improve the language, and especially the poetry. He had accomplished it. With our different estimate of the value of old English literature, we cannot indeed adopt Johnson's famous metaphor, and say that "he found

English of brick and left it of marble." The comparison of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* to "brick," with *Don Sebastian* and the *Spanish Friar* for "marble," would be absurd. But in truth the terms of the comparison are inappropriate. English as Dryden found it—and it must be remembered that he found it not the English of Shakespeare and Bacon, not even the English of such survivals as Milton and Taylor, but the English of persons like Cowley, Davenant, and their likes—was not wholly marble or wholly brick. No such metaphor can conveniently describe it. It was rather an instrument or machine which had in times past turned out splendid work, but work comparatively limited in kind, and liable to constant flaws and imperfections of more or less magnitude. In the hands of the men who had lately worked it, the good work had been far less in quantity and inferior in quality; the faults and flaws had been great and numerous. Dryden so altered the instrument and its working that, at its best, it produced a less splendid result than before, and became less suited for some of the highest applications, but at the same time became available for a far greater variety of ordinary purposes, was far surer in its working, without extraordinary genius on the part of the worker, and was almost secure against the grosser imperfections. The forty years' work which is at once the record and the example of this accomplishment is itself full of faults and blemishes, but they are always committed in the effort to improve. Dryden is always striving, and consciously striving, to find better literary forms, a better vocabulary, better metres, better constructions, better style. He may, in no one branch, have attained the entire and flawless perfection which distinguishes Pope as far as he goes. But the range of

Dryden is to the range of Pope as that of a forest to a shrubbery, and in this case priority is everything, and the priority is on the side of Dryden. He is not our greatest poet; far from it. But there is one point in which the superlative may safely be applied to him. Considering what he started with, what he accomplished, and what advantages he left to his successors, he must be pronounced, without exception, the greatest craftsman in English letters, and as such he ought to be regarded with peculiar veneration by all who, in however humble a capacity, are connected with the craft.

This general estimate, as well as much of the detailed criticism on which it is based, and which will be found in the preceding chapters, will no doubt seem exaggerated to not a few persons, to the judgment of some at least of whom I should be sorry that it should seem so. The truth is, that while the criticism of poetry is in such a disorderly state as it is at present in regard to general principles, it cannot be expected that there should be any agreement between individual practitioners of it on individual points. So long as any one holds a definition of poetry which regards it wholly or chiefly from the point of view of its subject-matter, wide differences are unavoidable. But if we hold what I venture to think the only Catholic faith with regard to it, that it consists not in a selection of subjects, but in a method of treatment, then it seems to me that all difficulty vanishes. We get out of the hopeless and sterile controversies as to whether Shelley was a greater poet than Dryden, or Dryden a greater poet than Shelley. For my part, I yield to no man living in rational admiration for either, but I decline altogether to assign marks to each in a competitive examination. There are, as it seems to me, many mansions in poetry, and the great

poets live apart in them. What constitutes a great poet is supremacy in his own line of poetical expression. Such supremacy must of course be shown in work of sufficient bulk and variety, on the principle that one swallow does not make a summer. We cannot call Lovelace a great poet, or Barnabe Barnes; perhaps we cannot give the name to Collins or to Gray. We must be satisfied that the poet has his faculty of expression well at command, not merely that it sometimes visits him in a casual manner; and we must know that he can apply it in a sufficient number of different ways. But when we see that he can under these conditions exhibit pretty constantly the poetical *differentia*, the power of making the common uncommon by the use of articulate language in metrical arrangement so as to excite indefinite suggestions of beauty, then he must be acknowledged a master.

When we want to see whether a man is a great poet or not, let us take him in his commonplaces, and see what he does with them. Here are four lines which are among the last that Dryden wrote; they occur in the address to the Duchess of Ormond, who was, it must be remembered, by birth Lady Margaret Somerset:—

> O daughter of the rose, whose cheeks unite
> The differing titles of the red and white,
> Who heaven's alternate beauty well display,
> The blush of morning and the milky way.

The ideas contained in these lines are as old, beyond all doubt, as the practice of love-making between persons of the Caucasian type of physiognomy, and the images in which those ideas are expressed are in themselves as well worn as the stones of the Pyramids. But I maintain that any poetical critic worth his salt could, without knowing who wrote them, but merely from the arrangement of the

words, the rhythm and cadence of the line, and the manner in which the images are presented, write "This is a poet, and probably a great poet," across them, and that he would be right in doing so. When such a critic, in reading the works of the author of these lines, finds that the same touch is, if not invariably, almost always present; that in the handling of the most unpromising themes, the *mots rayonnants*, the *mots de lumière* are never lacking; that the suggested images of beauty never fail for long together; then he is justified in striking out the "probably" and writing "This is a great poet." If he tries to go further, and to range his great poets in order of merit, he will almost certainly fail. He cannot count up the beauties in one, and then the beauties in the other, and strike the balance accordingly. He can only say, "There is the faculty of producing those beauties; it is exercised under such conditions, and with such results, that there is no doubt of its being a native and resident faculty, not a mere casual inspiration of the moment; and this being so, I pronounce the man a poet, and a great one." This can be said of Dryden, as it can be said of Shelley, or Spenser, or Keats, to name only the great English poets who are most dissimilar to him in subject and in style. All beyond this is treacherous speculation. The critic quits the assistance of a plain and catholic theory of poetry, and developes all sorts of private judgments, and not improbably private crotchets. The ideas which this poet works on are more congenial to his ideas than the ideas which that poet works on; the dialect of one is softer to his ear than the dialect of another; very frequently some characteristic which has not the remotest connexion with his poetical merits or demerits makes the scale turn. Of only one poet can it be safely said that he is greater than the other

great poets, for the reason that in Dryden's own words he is larger and more comprehensive than any of them. But with the exception of Shakespeare, the greatest poets in different styles are, in the eyes of a sound poetical criticism, very much on an equality. Dryden's peculiar gift, in which no poet of any language has surpassed him, is the faculty of treating any subject which he does treat poetically. His range is enormous, and wherever it is deficient, it is possible to see that external circumstances had to do with the apparent limitation. That the author of the tremendous satire of the political pieces should be the author of the exquisite lyrics scattered about the plays; that the special pleader of *Religio Laici* should be the tale-teller of *Palamon and Arcite*, are things which, the more carefully I study other poets and their comparatively limited perfection, astonish me the more. My natural man may like *Kubla Khan*, or the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, or the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, or *O World! O Life! O Time!* with an intenser liking than that which it feels for anything of Dryden's. But that arises from the pure accident that I was born in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Dryden in the first half of the seventeenth. The whirligig of time has altered and is altering this relation between poet and reader in every generation. But what it cannot alter is the fact that the poetical virtue which is present in Dryden is the same poetical virtue that is present in Lucretius and in Æschylus, in Shelley and in Spenser, in Heine and in Hugo.

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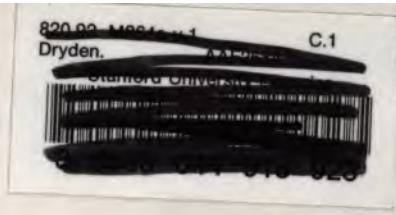

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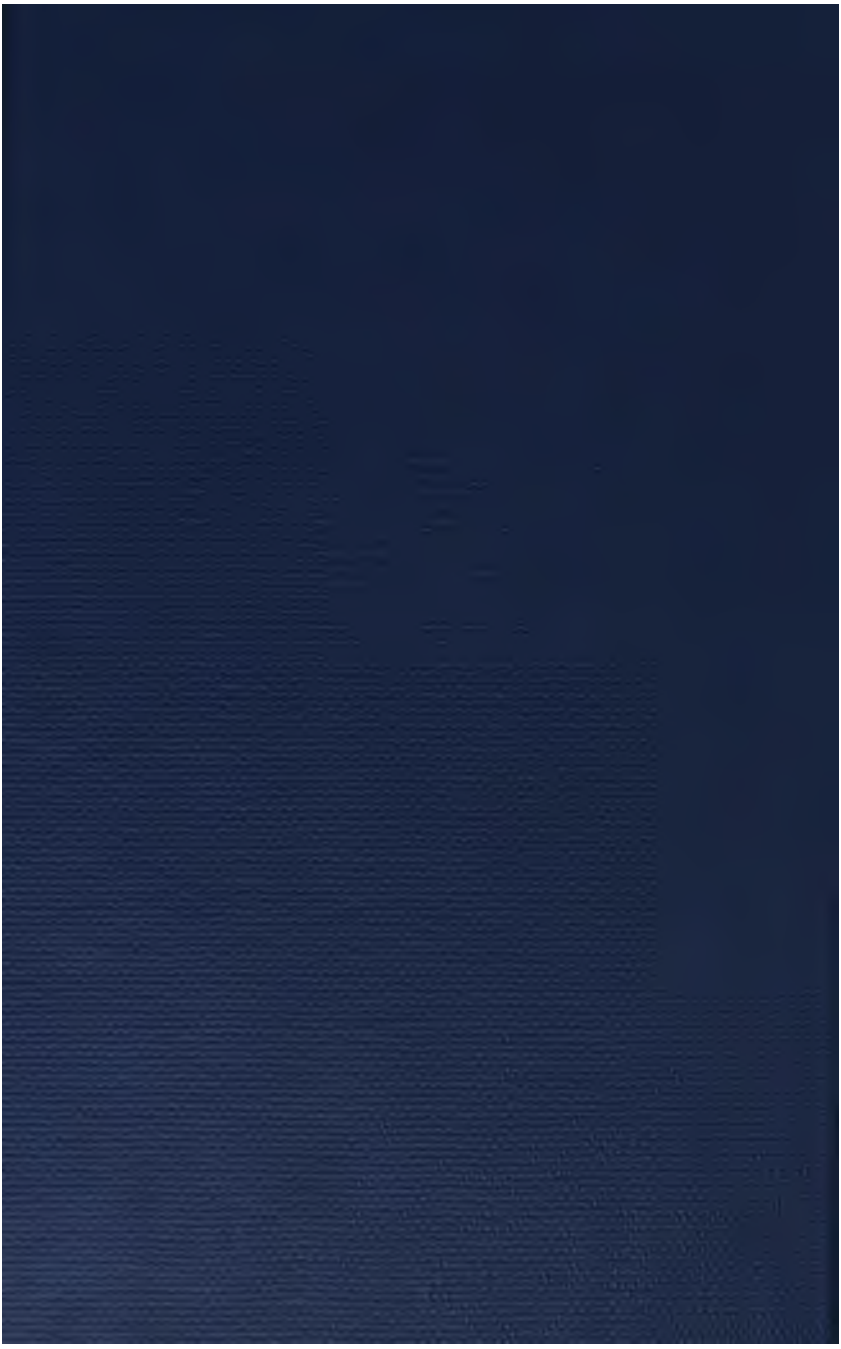
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